





PRESENTLY, THE MILLINER PRESENTED IT TO HER POISED ON HER FIST.

Page 176.

HENRIETTE
OR
A CORSICAN MOTHER

BY
FRANÇOIS COPPÉE

TRANSLATED BY
EDWARD WAKEFIELD

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Dedication.

TO

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MY DEAR BIOGRAPHER AND FRIEND,
M. DE LESCURE,
I DEDICATE VERY AFFECTIONATELY
THIS SIMPLE STORY.

F. C.



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FRANÇOIS COPPÉE.

CRITICAL NOTE BY THE TRANSLATOR.

THE most popular French writer of recent times is undoubtedly Émile Zola. His works run into hundreds of editions and fabulous thousands of copies, and the profits from them must be enormous. Yet there was a time when Zola could not get a hearing at all, and when some of these very books which now rush through their scores of editions, were a dead weight on the booksellers' shelves. The truth is that, apart from his "realism," which is often called by a harsher term, and which absolutely debars him from a large and most desirable class of readers, Zola is very heavy. His works are a painful and oppressive picture

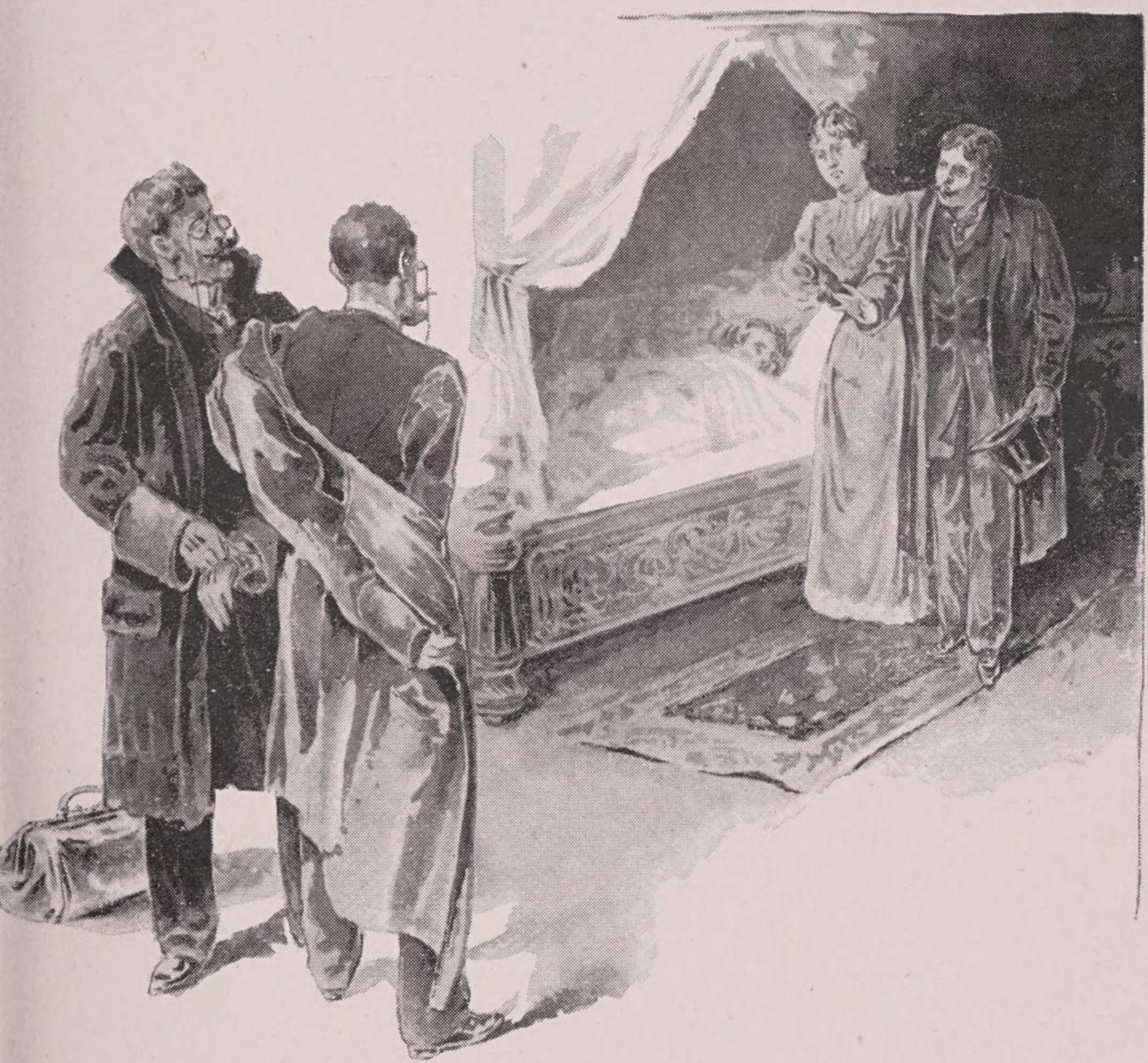
of a corrupt and degraded state of society, and are none the less repellant from their instinctive accuracy of detail.

The public, in fact, were not far wrong in their judgment on his early works, and it does not say much for the critical taste of the age that they changed their mind when Zola adopted a style which even French reviewers denounced as outrageous until they saw that it was going to be successful. Zola's latest works are little less dull, and a great deal more indecent, than his earliest; and there are abundant signs that his popularity is on the wane.

Next to Zola comes Alphonse Daudet, with a much more legitimate popularity, and one which, I imagine, he himself must be much prouder of. Zola's works have been described not unjustly as "a photograph of a dunghill." Daudet's are not photographs, nor is there anything of the dunghill in their subject. They are boldly executed crayon drawings

of a state of society where lights and shadows are both in extremes, and where there is ample field for the play of a vivid and delicate wit. Daudet also, singularly enough, was unappreciated at first. In that delightful book *Trente Ans de Paris*, which is neither more nor less than his literary autobiography, he tells an amusing story of Flaubert, who organized a series of Sunday dinners at a humble restaurant, called the *Réunion des auteurs sifflés*, "the hissed authors' club." Only thoroughly unsuccessful men were qualified, and as soon as any member sold a thousand copies of any work, he was expected to leave, whilst a second edition was considered altogether fatal. Zola and Daudet were distinguished and highly esteemed frequenters of this *Réunion*; and among these light-hearted men of genius, the hopeless failure of their own efforts to reach the temple of Fame, formed a perennial subject of conversation and of banter. Daudet tells us, in an inex-

pressibly comic vein, how uncomfortable he felt the first Sunday he dined with his friends the *auteurs sifflés* after he had achieved his first moderate success. He says he felt as if he were there under false pretences and could hardly look Zola or Flaubert in the face. He took refuge in deceit, and did his best to conceal the fact that his book was selling. A few weeks later, however, when the first edition was sold and a second had been called for, he was obliged to make a clean breast of it and throw himself on the mercy of his comrades. They consented to condone his offence in consideration of his many redeeming qualities ; and he describes with an admirable turn of irony how Zola, putting on an almost pharisaical air of self-satisfaction, exclaimed : “ Ah ! None of *us* will ever sell our books.” With this cutting remark, the delinquent was restored to favor ; but he says he could not help feeling that his friends looked upon him as a black sheep who could by no means be



THREE OF THEM CAME AT ONCE, WRAPPED IN HEAVY FUR COATS.

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trusted for the future. It was not long before every one of the leading members of the "hissed authors' club" took his place among the most successful men of letters in Europe. The little dinners were speedily transferred from the humble restaurant to Flaubert's now luxurious quarters, and there the comrades used to meet to congratulate each other on their triumphs and to criticise each other's works in the very spirit of open-hearted emulation.

Daudet never reached the dizzy pinnacle of success which Zola, after long years of heart-sickening disappointment, achieved at one leap. But having been the first of that brilliant company to attain a wide and a highly honorable renown, he has held it longer than any of them. Latterly, however, he has shown signs of having almost worked out his rich and varied vein. He has been republishing old, neglected or forgotten works; and that may generally be taken to mean that an

author is contented with his measure of success, that he is willing to rest on his laurels, and that he is not likely to produce much more.

There has been much curiosity as to who should be the next to occupy the chief place in the favor of the French, who, fickle in all else, are by no means so in literature. The position is an important one, for there are no writers who are so much read by other nations as the foremost men among French novelists.

The name of François Coppée has long been famous as that of the author of a number of excellent plays, of several series of charming *contes*, or short stories, and of a volume of refined and melodious poetry. It is a maxim among the French, that the test of a novelist's and even of a dramatist's qualifications is his capability of saying what he has to say within the limits of a short story. It is easy, they say, to embellish, to expand, to digress, to develop, but the true genius lies in the com-

pactness of the leading idea. In one of his most finished "Stories in Prose," Coppée makes a famous theatrical manager speak as follows :

"Anecdote, anecdote, everything is in that. No play is really a good one unless you can describe the plot in five minutes. Whenever an author comes to me whilst I am at breakfast, to talk about a new piece, I stop him at once :—Will you have told me the whole story before I have finished this poached egg ? If he cannot, then his play is worth nothing."

As regards novels, the manager, who was himself a distinguished man of letters, consented to extend the time from an egg to an omelette, but no farther. Now, judged by that standard, François Coppée himself might fairly have claimed to be the most capable writer of fiction living ; for no man has so completely established his capacity for telling his story in few words. One of his best known series of tales is called "*Contes rapides*," which may be translated, "Quickly Told Tales," and a more fitting title they could not have.

His "*Contes en Prose*," too, are models of compression. Some of them are so short, in fact, that they puzzle and disappoint the inexperienced reader; and it is not until he becomes more familiar with Coppée's essentially dramatic method, that he begins to discern that there is a great deal more in the tales than appears in the printed words. The more he reads them, the more he likes them; and before very long he finds his own intelligence and sympathies expanding this concentrated essence of fiction, so to speak, into romances long enough and full enough to occupy his thoughts for days. The first of the "*Contes en Prose*," the celebrated "*Coucher du Soleil*," is a wonderful composition in this respect. It occupies no more than eight small pages, and it has neither characters nor narrative. It is simply a description of sunset on an autumn evening in Paris. Yet it conjures up a scene of moving interest and of natural beauty, which not only fills the heart with a

deep sense of pathos but suggests a multitude of human motives and actions instinct with life and feeling. Another of these strange and powerful conceptions, "The Silver Thimble," which is as short as the "Sunset," is nothing less than a thrilling novel in eight pages. A writer of very moderate skill would have no difficulty in making a novel of three volumes without once going outside of this little story for materials. In truth, François Coppée's *Contes* have long been a mine of wealth to novelists and dramatists who have not a particle of Coppée's genius, imagination, or literary skill.

Hence it has come to be recognized that if Coppée should choose himself to exercise his powers in the ordinary forms of fiction, instead of merely supplying inferior men with ideas, he might step at once into the foremost place. His first novel was looked forward to with the greatest interest. Some of his warmest admirers, nevertheless, had grave misgiv-

ings. They feared that his very supremacy as a writer of *Contes* and of strikingly effective dramas, might mar his success as a novelist addressing a public whose taste was already vitiated by the specious prolixity and false effects of modern romance. They feared, in fact, that he would prove too good, or too strong, for his readers; and that, with all his efforts, he would be unable to dilute himself down to the level of the public appreciation. All such fears are dissipated now. In June last, he published "*Henriette*,"—which it has been my privilege to be the first to present to American readers in their own language,—and it passed through five editions in rapid succession, and is already assured of a triumphal success. Though the original has only been obtainable in America a few weeks, it is popular among that rapidly increasing class who can enjoy the best fiction; and it cannot be doubted that if I have succeeded in achieving an English version at all worthy

of the original, it will speedily command a still wider popularity.

A word here may be deemed not out of place upon a question which has long exercised the mind of leading American *littérateurs*, and which remains still undecided. I mean the question of whether or not illicit love may properly be made the subject of fiction for general reading in a community where the decencies of life are habitually observed and the sanctity of female virtue is universally recognized, at least externally. A well-known American reviewer, who never puts pen in ink but for some good purpose, has recently discussed this question somewhat fully and with that perfect sincerity and fairness which are happily characteristic of men of his standing in this country. The conclusion he came to is, that the public opinion of the best class of readers in America—which the best class of writers are bound to respect—is so decidedly averse from the passionate

school of fiction, that it is practically excluded from all American periodicals of good reputation, for the reason that these circulate in the family. On the other hand, there is a way of treating every human passion—the way of George Eliot, of Thackeray, of Walter Scott—which is by no means unacceptable to the most refined American readers when employed in works of fiction in book form,—works, that is to say, which stand by themselves for what they are, which are not carried into every household with miscellaneous matter, and which are well understood to be not written *pueris virginibusque*.

This is the judgment of one whose judgment in such a case is of the weightiest. Far be it from me to demur from it. On the contrary, I deem it a great advantage, in my earnest endeavor to interpret the great French writers to American readers, to have so clear but yet so delicate a standard laid down for me by one having authority. I claim that, of all the

French writers I know, François Coppée conforms the most distinctly to that standard. He is a Frenchman, and a Frenchman can no more be made to write like an Englishman than the leopard can be made to change his spots or the Ethiopian his skin. But he is a high-minded Frenchman with delicate perceptions of taste and feeling and without a trace of grossness in his style. From this cause, a translator who has a due regard for the sensibilities of those for whom his work is destined, finds it an easy task, a labor of love, to divest Coppée of so much of his manner as is too French for the American standard of refinement, without losing anything of his admirable style or of the vivid action of his story.

It must be conceded on all sides that "*Henriette*" is a model of a novel from the purely artistic point of view; and I shall feel that I have toiled in vain if I am told by any one whose opinion I value, that in the Eng-

lish version it is open to objection on moral grounds. It is true that the crucial interest of the story turns on illicit love. But there never was a novel where that subject was more deprived of coarseness or evil, or where the punishment of even the most pardonable fall from virtue was more strikingly exemplified. On the other hand, Coppée gives us in his second female character a noble portrait of an essentially virtuous and pure-minded woman. I know of no recent novel, indeed, where the beauty and value of purity in men, as well as in women, are thrown into stronger relief than in this touching story of youthful passion and overwhelming sorrow.

Recurring to the standard already alluded to as having been laid down by an adequate American authority, and to the particular mention of George Eliot as an exemplar for all novelists in their treatment of the subject of human passions, it is scarcely too

much to say that the contrast between Madame Bernard and Henriette Perrin is worthy to be placed beside that between Dinah Morris and Hetty Sorrell, while Coppée has succeeded in surrounding Henriette's character with an atmosphere of childlike devotion and self-sacrifice which is altogether wanting from Hetty's. If "Adam Bede" may properly be placed in the hands of delicate-minded readers,—and after an exhaustive controversy and the deliberation of thirty years, it has been emphatically declared to be so,—then I shall assuredly not incur reproach for having afforded the American public the opportunity of reading "Henriette."

It is a book which depends for its interest on the display of emotions common to all mankind, and it owes very little to any distinctively French qualities of the author. It might have been written by a feeling and eloquent American just as well as by a feeling and eloquent Frenchman; for it breathes

throughout, the inspiration only given by that touch of nature which makes the whole world kin.

EDWARD WAKEFIELD.

NEW YORK, *September, 1889.*



HENRIETTE.



CHAPTER I.

MOURNERS AND WAGERS.

THE priest had pronounced the absolution, and the first of the friends and acquaintances of the deceased, who had come out of the church, after dashing themselves with holy water, were standing in small groups in the square of St. Thomas Aquinas. Like men of the world, they soon entered into conversation, finding it a relief to breathe the fresh air of a bright March morning, after the weariness of an interminable service and the suffocating atmosphere of incense and heat from the steam-pipes.

Poor Bernard ! It was rather hard to have to pack up his traps at forty-two !

No doubt. But mind you, he did not take

care of himself. He had had a pretty gay time, eh ?

Yes, he was generally in it, when there was a game of *écarté* to be got.

And he nearly wore out the stair-carpet at the Café Bignon.

It was a case of bladder trouble, was it not ?

It was a case of burning the candle at both ends—that's what it was ! Gambling, women, and gormandizing. The fact is, he went the devil's own pace. I suppose his affairs are in a nice mess ?

Not at all. On the contrary, he had just realized on an old aunt worth five or six hundred thousand francs, and he must have left a very snug fortune for his widow and son.

Then the lovely Madame Bernard will marry again ?

Who can say ? Perhaps she won't, on account of the youngster. It seems, she is devoted to her son.

In short, there was very little mourning for

the dead man, although, from the undertaker's point of view, he was a first-class corpse, and was being put underground in the most gorgeous style, with full choral service, flowers from Nice, and stands of torches burning with a green flame round the catafalque. The master of the ceremonies was a most imposing figure,—a noble-looking old fellow, with an air of unutterable woe, and white whiskers like an ancient English peer. He was a very expensive man, having been taken from the provincial stage, where he formerly played heavy father with great success, and the management only sent him out on special occasions. Yet, notwithstanding all this paraphernalia, the deceased, M. Bernard des Vignes, Deputy and Member of the Council-General of la Mayenne, late Officer of Cavalry, Knight of the Legion of Honor, et cetera, was only dealt with according to his deserts in the remarks that were exchanged in a low voice behind black-gloved hands.

The truth was, he had never been anything but a coarse debauchee, without any sort of refinement or good taste in his vices, and he had remained a pot-house roisterer to the end, in spite of his fifteen years of Paris life. Nothing could be more commonplace than his history. Having plenty of money, he married, at twenty-eight, the daughter of a Corsican senator, a personal friend of Napoleon III. This was the much-admired Mademoiselle Antonini, whose classical beauty at that time created such a sensation at the Tuileries and at Compiègne. For a little time, he loved her, after his own fashion. Then suddenly becoming absurdly jealous of his wife, without any reason, he resigned his lieutenant's commission in the Empress's dragoons, and went and buried himself in his estates. There he soon degenerated into a regular country lout, almost living in his hunting-boots, smoking his pipe at table, after his coffee, and drinking heavily in a selfish, un-

sociable way. He had one child,—a boy,—who was Madame Bernard's only comfort, now that she was neglected by her rake of a husband. That worthy, after two years of house-keeping, used frequently to pay a visit to Paris and indulge in a debauch like a blue-jacket on leave; and even at home, when he went out hunting and got his breakfast at some rustic abode, he could not let the farm-girls alone.

The first cannon-shot in the war of 1870, however, awoke an echo in the soul of the besotted profligate, and reminded him that he had been a soldier. Having obtained the command of a body of irregulars, he fought with reckless bravery, was severely wounded, gained the cross, and at the elections was sent to the Chamber of Deputies by his Department. Like a thick-headed booby as he was, he always voted with the majority. From being a stout Conservative, he went round in turn to the Right Centre, the Left Centre, and

the Opportunists, never opened his mouth except to call for the *clôture*, and was always re-elected. But being required by his parliamentary duties to live at Paris, he threw the reins to his appetites, and rushed into every sort of dissipation.

Madame Bernard was henceforward left almost entirely to herself. She seldom saw her husband even at meal-times—that husband whom she had never loved, and whom she now thoroughly despised. Too virtuous to pay him back in his own coin, and too proud to complain, she retired from society, and living in almost absolute solitude in her vast apartment on the Quai Malaquais, she devoted herself entirely to her son, who was a day-scholar at the Lycée Louis-le-Grand, and who already showed signs of singularly precocious ability. She was one of those mothers who learn Latin and Greek so as to be able to correct their children's exercises and help them with their lessons. Every one spoke of

her with admiration ; for the few women who were admitted to her intimacy had no occasion to be jealous of her beauty, since she never placed it in competition with theirs, notwithstanding that it remained undimmed, her thirty years having merely given her the warm paleness of pure marble, while neither time nor grief had left its mark in a single wrinkle. The courageous and dignified way in which she bore her sorrow was quoted everywhere as an example, and Parisian malice did not draw attention, even by a smile, to the name of Colonel de Voris, a former brother officer of her husband's, who hardly dared show his respectful regard for Madame Bernard des Vignes by calling upon her bashfully from time to time.

At last, then, this poor woman's long trials were at an end. Bernard, "Big Bernard," as his club friends called him, had not been able to get over his last gorge of truffles ; and standing round his capacious coffin, on the

threshold of the church, where it was waiting to be put into the hearse, the mourners formed a circle to listen to the funeral orations.

But while the lying sentences were being rolled out, "worthy son of France, gallant soldier, spotless patriot," and all the rest of it, these worldly folks, sick of hearing about the dead man, of whom they already knew too much, were thinking, if they thought at all, of his rich and charming widow. She was free at last, and when the ceremony was over and the attendants were dispersing, this is what was said over and over again, amid the parting conversation :

"The beautiful Madame Bernard will marry again before a year is over. Will you take a bet about it ? "



CHAPTER II.

THE WIDOW'S RETROSPECT.

SOME weeks after the funeral, Madame Bernard des Vignes was sitting before her tapestry frame near the window of her boudoir, dressed in deep mourning. Her eyes were wandering over the landscape of the quay—with an air of abstraction, as if she were not looking at anything in particular. The view from there is very pretty on a fine day ; but she saw neither the pale blue spring sky, nor the river flashing back the sunshine as it swept along with its gay fleet of boats, nor the noble *façade* of the Louvre, nor the slender cluster of trees at the corner of the Pont Royal, where the faintest suggestion of green was al-

ready showing itself among the black branches. The beautiful widow sat listlessly in her arm-chair, with her elbow resting on the arm, and two fingers of one hand on her brow, while her close-fitting dress scarcely restrained her swelling bosom. She was calling up all her past life in one long reverie.

She saw herself once more at the Palace of the Tuileries, passing through the magnificent state apartments for the first time, on her father's arm. She heard a murmur of admiration behind her, above the rustling of the train of her ball-dress. She saw a sort of half-smile on the face of every one who looked at her, an expression of sudden pleasure, as if to thank her for being so beautiful. She saw the same charmed look again in the eyes of the Emperor and Empress, even at the moment when she was presented; and when the orchestra broke into the brilliant prelude of a waltz, it seemed to her as if this triumphal melody was sounded in her honor.

Then followed several months of gayety and dazzling excitement. She came into full bloom, like a prize rose, among the fairest of the young ladies at Court. She followed the Imperial hunt at Compiègne, galloping, like a queen of the Amazons, across the scarlet and golden glades of the autumnal forest. She was the celebrated Mademoiselle Bianca Antonini, and the Empress, yielding to that flow of sympathy which perfectly beautiful creatures have for one another, never came near her without paying her some gentle compliment, which she listened to with lowered eyelids and a deferential confusion.

But the misfortune was that she had no fortune, no dowry, or scarcely any. It was true the Emperor had rewarded his old friend Antonini's services with a seat in the Senate —services which had been rendered with a fidelity that combined the instinct of a spaniel with the fanaticism of a Mameluke, a devotion that would have impelled him at any moment

to throw himself between his master's breast and the assassin's dagger. But except his salary as senator, the old man had nothing but a house in ruins and a few acres of marsh in the wildest part of Corsica.

This conspirator, whose appealing eyes and grim moustache like a gendarme's pleased Napoleon III. by recalling his youth and his evil days, was a man of inflexible integrity. As a subaltern he had taken part in the affair at Strasbourg, at the risk of court-martial and a platoon of musketry. Yet, amid all the rascality of the period, he could show absolutely clean hands. Everybody knew that Mademoiselle Antonini was poor. When Bernard des Vignes, the handsome lieutenant of dragoons, waltzed with her three times running at a ball at the Tuileries, therefore, everybody thought her very lucky to have met with a match worth a hundred thousand francs a year.

She married without any compulsion, but

deliberately, with the object of allaying her father's anxiety for the future ; and immediately all her happiness vanished, like a scene at the theatre, that had been shifted. That was the effect of her husband's insane jealousy, her banishment to the country, and the bitter mortification of finding that the man to whom she had bound herself for life was a mere glutton, a coarse libertine, and little better than a drunkard. If it had not been for her new-born child, whom she had nursed herself, and whose arrival had filled her very heart and bowels with motherly love, she would assuredly have left her worthless husband ; for with her Corsican blood she had inherited the pride and vindictiveness, as well as the chastity, of her people. As it was, she resigned herself to her fate, for the sake of the child. But misfortunes followed one upon another. The Empire collapsed, and her father fell down dead with a stroke of apoplexy on hearing the news of the capitulation of Sédan. At length

her husband, having been chosen Deputy, took her back to Paris.

* * * * *

Then she recalled the long years of weariness and solitude passed in this same boudoir, beside this same window, before this river flowing all the time so slowly, so monotonously, like her life !

It was true she had her son, whom she loved with a passionate fondness, and who, at thirteen, was already a companion for her, he was so like a little man. Had not she lived until then for him alone ? Well, she would continue to do so—that was all ! She would watch over him, find a wife for him, and become a grandmother. Her dear little Armand ! She was expecting him then. It was just about his time for returning from the Lycée. She was filled with tenderness at the thought that in a few moments he would be in the room, looking rather fragile in his black clothes, that he would throw his arms round

her neck, and that she would kiss him long and fervently. She thought of his little face, pale from his studies, which he worked at with a will, and she yearned to clasp him in her arms and gaze lovingly into the very depths of those black eyes he had inherited from her, those eyes so luminous with the pure flame of intelligence and sensibility.

There was another recollection, however, which passed through Madame Bernard's reverie.

She was thinking now of the only one of her husband's friends who had become a friend of hers,—the only man who was capable of arousing any sentiment in her breast.

Every Thursday for several years past—Thursday was her “day”—a little before six, a time when she was never alone, Colonel de Voris had presented himself before her, cool, correct, rather stiff in his closely-buttoned military frock-coat, had taken his seat amid the circle of ladies, mixed with an effort in the

commonplace conversation, declined a cup of tea, and then taken his departure, after a visit of a quarter of an hour. He loved her ; she was certain of it, and she was touched by being treated with so much respect and timidity, especially by the hero of Saint-Privat, who, when his horse was killed under him, had seized a soldier's rifle, like Ney in Russia, and rallied his scattered troops. He loved her ! When she shook hands with him at parting, she always felt the Colonel's hand tremble,—that right hand which had been pierced by a German lance and which he hardly ever showed ungloved, from a feeling of modesty about his wound. Supposing she should wish to marry again ? This brave and honorable man, this knight of chivalry, with a heart still young in spite of his gray hair, would be a protector for Armand, a guide for him through life, a new and better father.

While the mind of the widow was following this train of thought, an indescribable sweet-

ness came into her beautiful face. What was affecting her then? What was it that made her heart beat so hard and so fast?

A servant suddenly announced Colonel de Voris.

Certainly, he owed Madame Bernard a visit of sympathy after her bereavement, and, as an old friend, he had a right to call upon her any day or at any hour. But why on this day of all others; why at the very instant when her thoughts were full of him? Was not this coincidence very strange?

Madame Bernard was quite agitated when she saw the Colonel come in, looking still young, with his slender figure and his dark moustache contrasting agreeably with his gray hair. He came to her, gave her his hand,—his wounded hand, without a glove,—took a seat near her, and spoke to her about her loss.

“I need not tell you how I felt for you in your grief,” he said.

Not another word upon that painful subject.

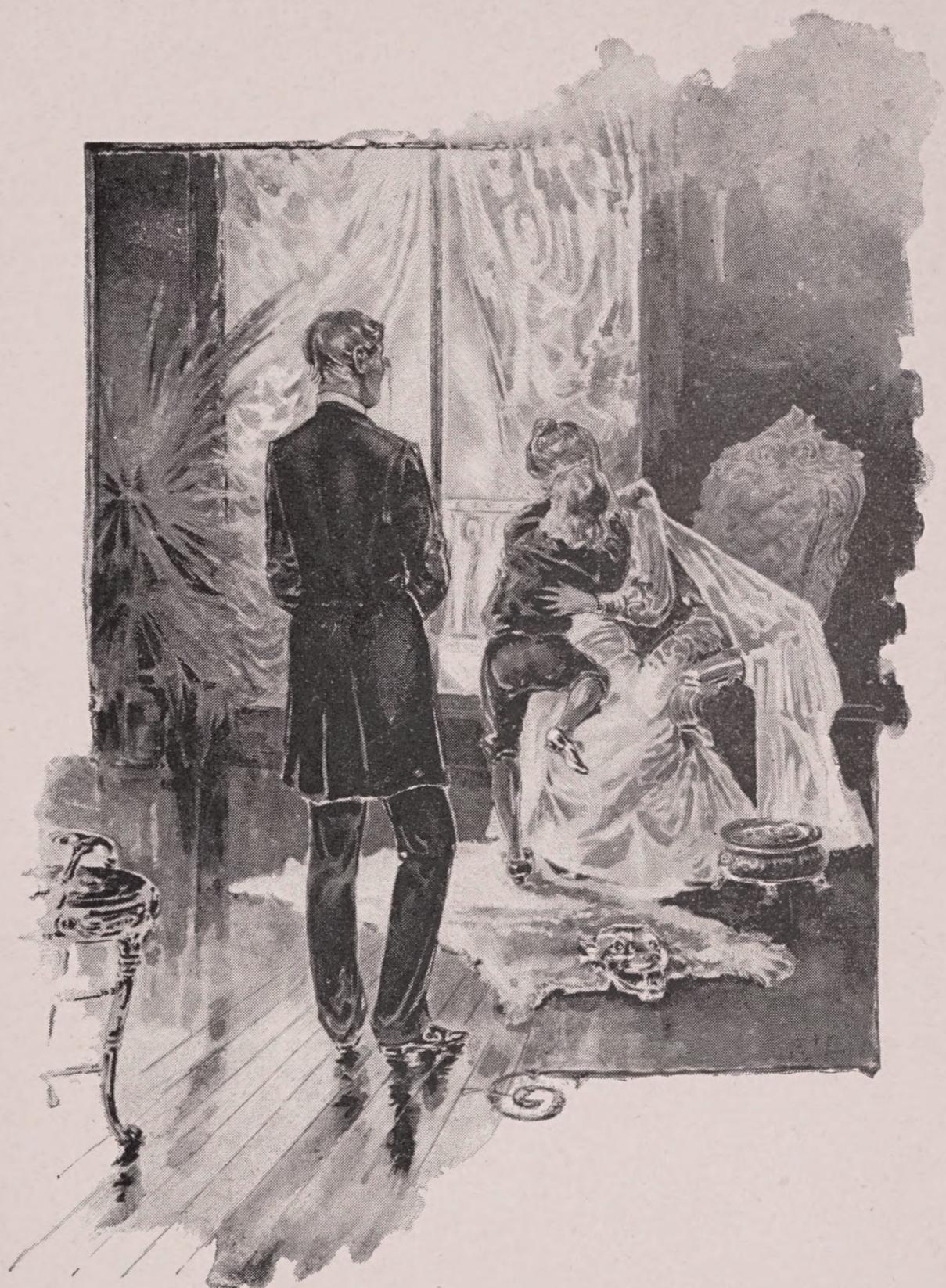
He had too much delicacy not to understand that she would be suffocated by condolences which could not be sincere. He then asked after Armand, and he spoke in a less formal tone when he mentioned the child's name.

But as the conversation still languished and was interrupted by long pauses, the Colonel said at length, not without some hesitation :

“ I also came, madame, to ask your advice.”

“ Advice ? From me ? What can it be about ? ”

“ Before your loss I intended to return to Algeria. I wished to go away to some distant post. I had a private reason. But now the new Minister of War has asked me to remain in Paris, and offered me an appointment on his staff. The distress of mind which impelled me to go away no longer exists, or, at least, I am not without hope of its being removed. I am in doubt as to what to do. Ought I to stay or to go ? I appeal to your friendship to answer me frankly.”



IT WAS HER SON WHO HAD JUST RETURNED FROM SCHOOL, AND WHO HAD THROWN HIS BOOKS ON TABLE AND WAS CLINGING NEXT MOMENT ROUND HIS MOTHER'S NECK.

Madame Bernard knew very well what he meant. Under this very thin disguise, the Colonel had asked her whether he might expect the reward of his silent fidelity. She only had to say one word, "Stay!" and, in a year, she would be the wife of a man whom she respected, who would console her for her past sufferings, and who would be a good father to her dear Armand. She would once more know what it was to be happy, to love, to live!

But the door suddenly opened, and a clear, childish voice cried, "How are you, mother?" Madame Bernard started. It was her son, who had just returned from school and who had thrown his books on the table, and was clinging next moment round his mother's neck.

"Good-day, my child," said the Colonel, "won't you shake hands with me?"

Armand hardly knew this solemn-looking visitor. He had rather a shy disposition. However, he touched the hand that was of-

ferred to him, but only from politeness and obedience; and a look of uneasiness, almost amounting to suspicion, passed over his great black eyes. Her son's manner was not lost on Madame Bernard. She saw what total strangers the man and the child were to one another, and, touched to the quick by that wonderful, all-powerful instinct of mothers, she felt herself blushing with shame to the very ears. What had she been thinking about a minute before, good God!

She rose from her chair, drew Armand close to her, placed one of her hands on her son's head with a caressing gesture, and then, looking down, but speaking quite calmly, she said to the Colonel, who was standing in front of her :

“I owe you an answer, my dear M. de Voris, and it will be as straightforward as your question. I think,—yes, I think you will do better to go to Algeria.”

The Colonel, having saluted respectfully,

left the room with the firm stride of a soldier whose commander has ordered him to go to certain death, and who goes.

It was settled. The beautiful Madame Bernard des Vignes would never marry again.





CHAPTER III.

CORSICAN JEALOUSY AND MOTHERLY LOVE.

FROM the hour when she came to that determination, the widow's love for her son increased in proportion to the sacrifice she had made for him. It became more passionate and jealous than ever. She could not bear Armand to be away from her. She wanted him to be constantly in her sight, or, if not that, she at least wanted to know that he was at home, close to her. She suffered in his absence, though it was never very long, since he only went to the Lycée during the hours of study ; and sometimes, yielding to an overwhelming desire to see him sooner than usual, she would order her carriage and drive

to the gate of Louis-le-Grand. She arrived there long before the time for the students to come out, sat restless and impatient, and cast longing glances at the door of the school, like a lover who has come first to the rendezvous. At last she heard the roll of the drum, which was the signal that the class was over; and if her child came out among the last, it positively gave her pain, and she almost thought of reproaching him for not having had a presentiment that she was there. She hastened to get him into the carriage, pressed him to her to kiss him on the forehead, as if he had just returned from a long voyage, and kept him close to her like that the whole way home, with the gesture of a miser hugging his gold.

Sometimes Armand came out of the Lycée laughing and chatting with a schoolfellow, and Madame Bernard, suddenly feeling uneasy, put a score of pressing questions to her son: "What is that boy's name?" "Who is

he?" "What are his parents?" "Do you really wish to make a friend of him?" And if Armand, with the ready enthusiasm of his age, spoke warmly of his young classmate, and praised his abilities or his good qualities, Madame Bernard experienced a painful feeling and already conceived a mistrust of this youth who seemed to have come between her and her son. She knew it was unjust, and she blamed herself for it. Instead of feeling hurt, she reasoned with herself,—ought she not, on the contrary, to have rejoiced that Armand had an affectionate disposition and a tendency to make friends?

"Invite that young man to come to the house," she said, making a great effort. "I shall be delighted to receive him."

When she saw the schoolfellow again, she tried to be particularly pleasant to him, as if to punish herself for having thought ill of him. But she did not succeed very well; it was too much for her; and she did not quite recover

her self-possession until the visitor had gone and she again had her son all to herself.

Armand was perfectly well aware of this jealousy and distrust in his mother's love for him. His intelligence and sensibility had been prematurely developed, for the very reason that from his earliest infancy he had been tied to his mother's apron-strings and brought up all alone with her and her caresses. In his refined nature there was not a trace of those selfish, coarse, ungrateful impulses which are unfortunately only natural to most boys. This strange child, while he worked hard at his studies and found a positive pleasure in carrying off the college prizes, understood and appreciated the movements of his mother's heart. He made a thousand excuses for her if she let her passion for him run to excesses that became painful, and in all his conduct towards her he showed her the utmost consideration and gentleness, and treated her with as much delicacy as if he had been a man.

It was an unspeakable joy to Madame Bernard to realize that she was loved so deeply and so warmly. She reproached herself then for monopolizing her son and keeping him too close to her side. She encouraged his school-fellows to come to the house, and received them with kindness, and she even wished to give Armand more liberty. Far from abusing it, however, as many other young fellows of his age would have done, he became more devoted to her than ever, and more assiduous in his attentions. For several years she was the happiest of mothers.

One of her greatest delights was to go out for walks in Paris, on her son's arm. He was just finishing his last year at college, and had grown into a handsome, slender young man. He dressed remarkably well, too, without any boyish awkwardness. As for Madame Bernard, she was still in her bloom at thirty-six. A great many heads turned round as they passed along; but the beautiful widow scarcely no-

ticed that the men still gave her the old look of sudden pleasure. She was too much occupied in observing how the women all fixed their glance for a moment on her son, and showed in their eyes that fugitive smile which plainly means : “What a good-looking fellow !” He, however, did not seem to notice it at all, and that was another great comfort to his mother. She rejoiced to think that her dear boy, who was so clever and so precocious in many ways, was, nevertheless, so pure-minded that he was actually ignorant of his own attractions.

She thought about this a great deal sometimes at that critical period of his life when the youth becomes a man. Yes, a day would come—a dreaded day—when Armand would love some other woman better than he loved her, and in a different way. This thought distressed her so acutely that she had not the courage to face it. She tried to avoid resting upon it and to drive it out of her

mind. It stood to reason that later on—much later on—when Armand had passed his examination and chosen a profession, he would marry. That was only natural. She herself would do what was right when that time came. She would help him to find a companion who would make him happy. But a mistress, a thief of young hearts, who takes a son away from his mother and sends him back to her with disordered wits and hollow eyes,—to the vindictive Corsican, the profigate's unsullied widow, the jealous and exacting mother, such a woman was a detested enemy whom she could not think of, even by anticipation, without clinching her teeth and trembling with rage.





CHAPTER IV.

THE ENEMY IN THE HOUSEHOLD.

As Fate would have it, Madame Bernard des Vignes herself introduced this future rival into her own house just at the time when her son, who had reached his twentieth year, was preparing for his final examination for the law.

Her name was Henriette Perrin, and she was a common seamstress who went out by the day. A friend of Madame Bernard's, a very benevolent person, had warmly recommended this young girl to her. She was scarcely nineteen, she had lost both father and mother, and she had nothing to live upon but what she could earn,—three francs a day and her meals—and yet she managed out of these slender resources to give some assistance to an aged aunt with whom she lived. Madame Bernard

took a fancy to this pretty little creature the first time she saw her : she was so nicely mannered and well behaved, and she dressed with so much taste—the instinctive good taste of the Parisian work-girls, who contrive to look like ladies in a frock worth twenty sous a yard, put together by their own industrious hands. The seamstress also succeeded in gaining the friendship of Léontine, Madame Bernard's old housekeeper, who reported most favorably of her to her mistress.

“ That poor child ! ” she said to Madame Bernard. “ She comes on foot from the other end of Vaugirard at eight o'clock in the morning without any breakfast. I give her some coffee and milk, and immediately afterwards she settles down to her work in the little parlor as grave as a judge and as quiet as a mouse. I call her ‘ Little Miss Silence.’ All day long she plies her needle. She sews and sews, without ever stopping to rest. And she looks so pretty all the while. Madame has noticed

her beautiful fair hair, and you could put your two hands round her waist. As Madame has given permission, I bring her her meals on a tray. Madame is quite right ; it is not a good thing for a young girl to be down in the kitchen among the servants. She eats very cleanly, and never lets a crumb of bread fall. Sometimes we have a little chat together ; she has a very hard lot, Madame. Would you believe it,—if it weren't for her, this very moment her aunt would be among those old paupers you see warming themselves in the sun on the benches in front of the Salpêtrière. So young and so brave, and to have family cares ! It's sad to think of ! ”

Madame Bernard soon saw for herself that the little seamstress really deserved these praises. She always found her the same gentle, timid, hard-working, touching little creature, and to show her interest in her she promised her three days' work a week. She got into the habit, when passing through the parlor,

of looking for the fair head bent over her work near the window, and she often stopped and said a few pleasant words to Henriette. The girl seemed to have a peculiar charm about her; for when Madame Bernard saw she was not in her usual place she thought with a feeling of regret, "Oh, it is not one of her days."

Things had gone on in this way for some months, when Madame Bernard received a letter in a bad handwriting and very doubtful spelling, in which Henriette took leave of her, thanked her for her kindness, and informed her that she had got regular employment at a fashionable dressmaker's.

"The little creature might have come and told me that herself," Madame Bernard said, rather vexed. "I am sure I have been kind enough to her. But, after all, these poor people's time is precious. It's their bread. I'm very glad she has got a good place, at all events."

She thought no more about the subject.

But a few days afterwards, having gone into her son's room to put fresh flowers in the vases, she saw a letter which had fallen on the carpet, picked it up to put it on the writing-table, and, glancing carelessly at the envelope, read the name of Armand Bernard, and almost lost her senses when she recognized the seamstress's childish handwriting. Had she or had she not a right to read this letter? This scruple did not detain her more than three seconds. It was a matter that concerned her son, and for his sake she would have committed perjury, murder, or any other crime. She quickly took the letter out of the envelope and unfolded it. These words flung themselves into her face and burned her eyes as if they had been vitriol:

“ My darling Armand, come and *wate* for me this afternoon when I come out of the shop. We will spend the *evining* together. I love you better than my life.

“ HENRIETTE.”

Blinded, thunderstruck, with a burning sen-

sation at the root of every hair on her head, her knees crushed under the weight of her emotion, Madame Bernard sank helplessly into her son's study chair.

So, the very thing she had feared, but had hardly dared to look forward to—and then only in the distant future—had already come about. Her son had a mistress. And who was she? The sewing-girl of the house. Why not the chambermaid or the woman that washed the saucepans? Yes, her Armand whom, until that very evening, she thought as pure as a flower of spring; her refined, aristocratic boy, with his white skin and his slender figure, looking like a prince of royal blood, belonged to this street girl, this baggage dragged out of the gutters of Paris! No doubt he loved her, and he had very likely covered this horrible letter with kisses, written, as it was, like a washerwoman's bill. And she had seen nothing and suspected nothing! Oh, blind! oh, fool!



MADAME BERNARD FELL HELPLESSLY INTO HER SON'S STUDY CHAIR.

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What ! It was she herself who, in her senseless good-nature, had given this harlot shelter under her own roof ! It was too much ! She remembered now having drawn Armand's attention to the sewing-girl and having spoken kindly about her before him. Then, it was for that, she had devoted every minute of her life to Armand ; it was for that, she had borne without complaint long years of outrage and neglect after her marriage ; it was for that, she had renounced the hope, the certainty of happiness by sending Colonel de Voris away ! She had watched over her child as a miser over his gold ; she had reared him like a hot-house flower ; she had made him the sole treasure of her mother's heart and bowels, the sole object of her devotion and love—and all that he might yield to the first impulse of sexual desire and become the prize of a demirep, the passing fancy of a street-walker ! And she had been such a simpleton, such a fool, as to suppose that he was better and more fastidious

than other men! Why should he be? He had his father's blood in his veins, the vicious, dissipated blood which formerly used to throw "Big Bernard" into a paroxysm of lust at the sight of the lowest and coarsest woman on the pavement. Yes! It was all too true! It was only what might have been expected.

Crushed, wounded, with a flood of bitterness and disgust rising in her heart, Madame Bernard remained seated, her eyes still on the fatal letter, in the pretty room where everything around her—the graceful furniture, the subdued light, the handsomely bound books, even the faint perfume of the little articles in Vienna leather, all arranged in their order on the writing-table—reminded her of her son's refined habits and of his pure and studious youth. The letter itself, which she still held in her hand; the letter which she had come upon as you might come upon a toad on the smooth gravel of an English park; this letter that stank of the lower orders, scrawled on a piece of

paper bought from the grocer, with its two glaring mistakes in spelling, and its vulgar handwriting—like a child's at a charity school.—ugh! it brought a feeling of sickness to the poor virtuous woman's very lips.

All at once, Armand came in with his student's portfolio under his arm, careless, light-hearted, his eyes sparkling with the brightness of youth, and only surprised to find his mother in his room.

"You here!" he exclaimed, as if delighted to see her. "How do you do, mamma?"

But Madame Bernard had risen and was standing stiff and pale. She threw Henriette's letter on the desk, pointed it out to her son with a trembling finger, and in a voice that he scarcely recognized, a metallic voice full of anger and contempt, she said:

"I have read it. Another time, take care not to leave your mistress's letters about."

She added, with a gasp, as if she were choking:

“And such a mistress!”

Then, leaving the young man speechless and purple with shame, the enraged mother went out of the room and slammed the door behind her.





CHAPTER V.

AT CROSS PURPOSES.

THERE was a great deal of excuse to be made for these poor young people, all the same.

Like his mother, Armand, when he passed through the little parlor, had been interested in that gentle profile which gently bent down to salute him as he went by. But he had not seen—so innocent was he—the glance, quickly turned aside, but very tender whilst it lasted, that the seamstress cast upon him. Neither had he seen the blush that mounted to her face when he was gone. As for her, the first time she had set eyes on Armand—yes, at the first blow, without any resistance—she had

fallen in love with him, and thenceforward the handsome and refined youth, with his graceful manners and his bright, sweet eyes, seemed to belong to a higher order of creation. Henriette was a virtuous girl, but she was not ignorant. From the time when she was apprenticed to her trade, the conversation of the other girls had taught her a good deal. But never had she had the boldness to dream of the object of her rising love, with any feeling of desire.

In her eyes Armand was a "gentleman," one of those superior beings whom the poor cannot know and can only see from afar. She felt sure that he had a sweetheart, for in her class no one supposes that a man can remain innocent till he is twenty; but she imagined his lover must be a woman in his own social circle, a fine lady, and, without knowing her, but having no doubt of her existence, Henriette thought her very fortunate, and envied her the pleasure of passing her jewelled fingers

through the young patrician's dark, curly hair, which was always a little in disorder. She, poor girl ! must be content to admire him respectfully at a distance. When he said to her, in passing, "Good-morning, mademoiselle," it gave her an exquisite feeling that sank down to the bottom of her heart. But to conceive that she could attract Armand's attention, or appear beautiful in his eyes ! No, she was not so mad.

He thought her charming. He was drawn towards her by all those feelings of curiosity and excitement which were just beginning to awaken and assert themselves with all the force of virgin passion. Up to that time, it was true, he had been quite virtuous, never having known either the degrading associations of the school dormitory, nor the brutalizing experiences of a man about town. But his hour of trial had come. At the very thought of this lovely creature being there, in the same house with him, Armand sank

under the weight of a sudden languor and became incapable of all work. Suddenly leaving his open books, he would find some hypocritical pretext for walking through the rooms, so as to pass through the parlor where Henriette was seated at her sewing, to cover her with a rapid glance, and receive in return a quick flash from her eyes. Then he would return to his own room, throw himself wearily on his bed, and lie there quite overcome, with a burning forehead and restless hands, yearning for her and feeling half inclined to cry.

Being more versed in the secrets of life than he was, Henriette came at last to see how her presence affected the young man. Was it possible? He had taken a fancy to her! This "perfect gentleman," so refined, so "elegant," as she said in her own mind, in the language of her order; this Armand, who seemed to be of a different race from herself, whom she looked up to as a sort of demigod, deigned to take notice of her! In the sincerity of her

humility, she was thrown into confusion, at first, by the very idea of such a thing. But after that her heart overflowed with infinite tenderness.

Ah ! Armand only had to make a sign. She was his, as soon as he chose to take her ! Very simple-minded and naturally modest, she knew nothing about the arts of flirtation or the diplomacy of love. Yes, in the twinkling of an eye she was ready to offer herself to him, with all her bloom of youth, ready above all to give him her heart, in the depths of which she felt a mysterious irresistible force, which seemed to lift her up and force her into Armand's arms. Already she reproached herself for not making the first advances to him. She saw how bashful he was, and she would gladly have encouraged him. But she could not overcome her own feeling of modesty. Yet she thought it would be so easy to respond to Armand's glance by another glance, and to his smile by another smile. Poor, fond, foolish

creature! When he passed near her now, she had not even the courage to raise her head. In this fashion days and days slipped away without the young man, who was so much adored, ever guessing that he was adored at all,—without this short-sighted Daphnis discovering that the nymph was waiting for him as if he had been Jupiter himself.





CHAPTER VI.

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM.

BUT the catastrophe was inevitable.

One beautiful Sunday,—it was towards the end of the month of May,—a Sunday with bright blue sky and sunshine warm enough to bring out summer frocks, Armand, who was engaged to dine with one of his college friends, had taken leave of his mother about four o'clock and gone for a walk, wherever his steps might lead him.

When he got outside, he felt in terribly low spirits, in spite of the warm air and the glorious sunlight. He looked enviously at all the common folks who passed in couples, bent on enjoying their holiday. What Parisian, during the stormy hours of his youthful prime, has

not experienced these weary wanderings, or that dismal feeling of solitude and misery in the midst of the happy crowd?

He walked with heavy steps the whole way up to the top of the Rue Saints-Pères, turned to the right by the Rue de Sèvres, passed through the square with its groups of plane-trees, and, leaving behind him the closed window fronts of the Bon Marché, continued his stroll along the spacious pavement that runs under the old wall of the Laënnec Hospital. At that time of day on Sunday, in the summer, this great street of the clerical quarter is almost deserted. The shops where they sell religious emblems are shut. The nuns and the bands of orphans have already gone back to vespers. There are hardly any foot-passengers, except a few workmen or little shopkeepers out for their Sunday, or here and there, perhaps, a couple of white-gloved soldiers, or a priest hurrying along in his black cassock. Those are about all, and every ten

minutes the omnibus comes jolting heavily down the middle of the street, as if it were asleep.

But round the entrance to the hospital, the shabby stalls for flowers, biscuits and oranges, and the visitors going in and out, give the appearance of a little more animation. It was in the middle of this collection that Armand suddenly set eyes on Henriette a few paces ahead of him. She wore a dress of the lightest material, and of the palest shade of peagreen, which brought out to perfection the shape of her supple, slender figure. A pretty bunch of corn-flowers were gracefully arranged in her wicked little brown straw bonnet, and she was holding her parasol open over her shoulder, with a well-gloved hand. In this simple attire, the little Parisian presented a charming picture of youth and freshness. When she recognized Armand she blushed a rosy red, and her open mouth, her glittering white teeth, her eyes like mignonnette wet with

dew, her fair hair sparkling with gold, her humble but dainty costume even, seemed to give him a smile of welcome.

Armand had raised his hat; and though his heart was beating hard enough to be heard, he was going to pass her, the simpleton, without speaking. She, however, gave him such a pleasant "Good-day, sir," that he could not help stopping; and longing to get into conversation with her, yet not knowing what to say, he asked her in a shaky voice where she was coming from.

She was almost as much confused as he was, and, in answer to his question, she spoke hurriedly, as if merely for the sake of saying something.

She was coming out of the hospital, where she had been to take some little comforts to her aunt, who had been laid up sick for a fortnight. But it was nothing very bad. The poor old lady was better already and would soon be sent to the convalescent ward. Hen-



ARMAND HAD RAISED HIS HAT AND, THOUGH HIS HEART WAS BEATING HARD ENOUGH TO BE HEARD,
HE WAS GOING TO PASS HER, THE SIMPLETON, WITHOUT SPEAKING.

riette was glad of that ; for it was very dull for her to find the house all alone, as she said, when she went home every evening.

They were neither of them thinking of what they were saying. They were looking into the depths of each other's eyes and trembling with excitement. This meeting, and their getting into conversation, seemed to both of them an extraordinary event. To speak like this in the open street to a young girl whom, after all, he scarcely knew at all, was the boldest thing Armand had ever done in his life ; whilst, as for the love-stricken maiden, she was as much bewildered as a shepherdess in a fairy story when the king's son comes in his grand carriage to ask for her hand.

Without seeming to notice what they were doing, the young couple found themselves walking along side by side. Armand, with his mouth parched and his temples throbbing, tried in vain to think of something to say.

“ So, then, mademoiselle— Now, you are

going— Are you— Are you going for a walk?"

"Oh, good heavens! no, sir. I must run home directly to get my dinner. Not that that will take long. And then I must go to bed early. You know I have to be up at seven in the morning."

Armand sighed at the thought that she was going to leave him and that he should see no more of her. A project of unparalleled audacity, for him, passed through his mind, and, with something of the desperate courage of cowards, he stammered out:

"You told me just now, mademoiselle, that you found it very dull being all alone in the evening. Well, since you are disengaged, will you give me a great pleasure,—a very great pleasure, I assure you,—will you come and take dinner with me?"

Henriette was almost beside herself with surprise and joy. She thought she must be dreaming. The fairy story went on.

"What! Do you really mean it, Monsieur Armand?"

Already the use of his Christian name, which had passed her lips for the first time, established a certain intimacy between them.

"Are you in earnest? Do you invite me to dinner?"

He thought she was going to refuse, and the fear of that made him more reckless than ever.

"Yes, certainly. Let us dine together somewhere, like two companions. I have a friend expecting me, but it does not matter. I will make some excuse. I will send a note from the restaurant. Do say yes. You will make me so happy."

Then, losing his head altogether, he added:

"You are so charming! I want to know you well, and I want you to make a friend of me."

And he dared to offer her his arm.

Henriette took it. She felt as if she were

going to faint, and letting out her own secret in her delirium, she murmured :

“ What happiness ! I never do anything else but think about you ! ”

Poor children ! In a quarter of an hour or less they were able to speak freely, and already, in the artless sincerity of their passion, they had exchanged vows of eternal love. So absorbed were they in their happiness that they wandered on without knowing where. They had reached the Boulevard Montparnasse, where there were a great many foot-passengers, and the good folks kept turning round with a smile to look back at the handsome couple, so nicely dressed and looking so young and sweet. But the lovers were too much occupied with their own bliss to take any notice of them. They got into conversation again, and now they were able to discuss the time when they were so bashful and restrained.

“ Is it truly so ? ” asked Armand. “ Have you had a little feeling for me all the time ? ”

"A little feeling!" replied Henriette. "I have only lived for the minutes when you passed through the parlor. Directly I saw the handle of the door turning I could tell whether it was you or not. Oh! if you only, only knew!"

"Is it possible! And I never noticed anything!"

"Oh, but I did," said Henriette, with a knowing look. "I noticed that you passed near me very often."

"And to think," Armand went on, getting very excited now, "that that might have lasted forever, and unless we had met this evening—But it is all over now, thank Heaven! There is an end of it! What a lucky chance it was, my meeting you! I was very nearly passing you without saying a word, I was so afraid of offending you. But I saw in your eyes directly that I might speak to you and that you would be pleased if I did. We know each other better now, don't we? And we will manage

to meet again and see each other very often—as often as possible ! And you will be my own little sweetheart, won't you ? ”

The poor girl, speaking with the open-heartedness of her class, which a sceptic might have taken for effrontery, but which seemed delightful to Armand, replied in a deep voice and with her eyes lowered, “ You know very well—I will ! ”





CHAPTER VII.

THE FRUIT OF THE FORBIDDEN TREE.

NEAR the Montparnasse railway-station they went into the restaurant Lavenue, which Armand happened to know through having breakfasted there with some of his friends at the Law School, and they seated themselves in what is called by courtesy the garden, though it is only planted with gas-lamps and hat-stands. That day, however, an acacia that was in full bloom a little way off spread a delicious odor of spring about the place. Armand first sent a note by a *commissionnaire* to excuse himself at the house where he had been invited, and then ordered dinner, or rather

accepted the *menu* that was imposed upon him by the pompous proprietor of the hotel. What did the sole Joinville or the fillet Rossini signify to the young couple? They were sitting face to face with one another, devouring one another with their eyes and twittering like two birds, and there was passion and affection even in the most ordinary things they said : "Some water ; thank you. Oh, please fill it quite up." "A little more fish ? Do, now. You have eaten nothing."

Armand persuaded his new friend to talk, and she told him her humble history. No, sure enough, she had not been born with a silver spoon in her mouth. Yet, when she was very small, her life had not been a hard one. Her father, a widower, was a skilled mechanic, and earned enough to enable him to supply all the wants of his little girl and of his elderly sister who had charge of the child. But one day the poor man was caught in a wheel at his workshop and died of his injuries.

Henriette was then left alone with her aunt, a woman from the country, who was entirely without means. Her father's former employer made the child a small allowance, and the old woman kept house. But with it all, they had to undergo great hardship. The child, who had just been confirmed, was obliged to be apprenticed to a trade and to leave school, where, by-the-by, she had never learnt much.

"Oh ! Monsieur Armand, if you could only see my scrawl and the shocking mistakes I make. I am so ashamed of it!"

Then she told him of the long years of poverty and suffering they had to endure, the furniture and comforts of their poor home going bit by bit, the clock sent over and over again to the pawnshop to provide them with food, and the dread they had of each approaching rent-day. Fortunately, she soon became very skilful at her trade, and now they had enough to live on,—just enough, and

that was all, but still they could manage to live on it. Moreover, there was a likelihood of her position improving. Some one had spoken about her to Madame Pamela, the great dressmaker, who had a vacancy in her work-room, and in a few days, the next day perhaps, she hoped to get into that famous house, where she might earn a hundred and fifty or two hundred francs a month.

Armand listened to her with the deepest pity for such a child who had already worked so hard and suffered so much. He compared his own pampered and unruffled childhood with the life of privation, the darkest days of which the young girl described almost with gayety. He reflected that the louis which he was going to pay for their dinner would have been enough in those times to keep Henriette and her aunt for a whole week. Armand had an excellent heart, and the tears came into his eyes when the seamstress, with her graphic expressions and her narrative filled with truth-

ful and painful details, revealed to him the habitual virtues and the daily sacrifices of the poor; so brave and so ingenious in the midst of their misery.

The sun was setting when their coffee was served, and as they left the restaurant, the gas-lights burned pale against the crimson of the western sky. When Henriette took Armand's arm again, of her own accord, in a trustful, wifelike way, he experienced a very delightful sensation.

But the driver of a victoria, drawing his horse up beside the pavement, made a sign to them.

"It's a beautiful evening," said the student. "Shall we take a turn in the Bois de Boulogne?"

"Oh yes," cried the girl, joyfully. "It is so nice to see some real trees!"

She confessed that she had not been in an open carriage four times in her life, perhaps; and she was very much amused by the novelty

of the thing at first and chatted away about her own inexperience.

The country? She scarcely knew what it was. Sometimes on Sunday evening in the summer time, when the weather was fine, her aunt took a bottle of wine and water and some cold meat in a basket, and they went and had dinner at the fortifications, to get a breath of "fresh air."

"But that is not real country, is it?" she said, "where there are so many melon-frames and tall factory chimneys?"

As for the Bois de Boulogne, she had seen some ugly savages in the Acclimatization Garden. The crowd was too great and there was too much dust, and then they had to wait so long to get back by the tramway! But this evening it would be charming.

It was just getting dark when they arrived at the Arc de Triomphe; and when Henriette saw before her under the starlit sky the vast, shadowy Avenue de l'Impératrice and the



THE YOUNG MAN LEANED OVER HENRIETTE AND MURMURED PASSIONATELY IN HER EAR,
“I LOVE YOU.”

innumerable carriage lamps glittering like gigantic will-o'-the-wisps, she drew a long breath of admiration and relapsed into silence, overwhelmed with astonishment and delight.

Armand sat closer to his companion and took her hand. As she withdrew it, he feared at first that she meant to resist his advance. But, instead of that, Henriette took off her gloves and gently surrendered both her bare hands to him. At this first touch of one another, a thrill of delicious pleasure passed through them. The air grew fresher, and a whiff of the forest, odorous of all green things, swept their faces caressingly. The roll of the numberless carriages and the rhythmic footfall of the horses made a confused but soothing cadence. They felt as if they were being carried along by a wave. The young man leaned over Henriette and murmured passionately in her ear: "I love you!" Then he gazed into her eyes in the darkness of evening, and found them fixed on his, full of pensive tenderness.

Henriette was deep in thought. This was the most rapturous moment of her whole life, but it was also the most serious. In a little while, Armand would take her back to her home in Vaugirard, at the end of the Rue Lecourbe. Her aunt was not there; and if he asked to come up into her room, she would not say No. She would not have strength enough to refuse him anything. But, after all, this evening, or the next day, or later,—what did it matter?—she was sure to be his.

Alas! she did not deceive herself, this daughter of the people. The young man, whom she now saw was much more innocent than she had supposed before, was in love with her, no doubt. But how long would he love her? She had nothing to give him but her youth and her poor loving heart. He would surely be ashamed of such a humble sweetheart, such a “common” girl. It is only in grannies’ stories that Prince Charming marries Ass’s Skin or Cinderella. Even if she

were able to inspire him with a stronger and better feeling than a passing fancy, and were to attach him to her by a lasting affection, they would be compelled to part, sooner or later, in spite of everything.

That was the history of plenty of her girl friends. One, two, three gay years of mad enjoyment with a lover with white hands, and then good-by forever ! No, what she was doing was not wise. Some day she would be abandoned like the others, like her companions in the work-room. Most of those, the idle ones, the venal or the vicious ones, had become "bad women." A few, who had more sense, had married a man in their own rank of life,—a coarse, foul-mouthed working-man, who got drunk and very likely beat them.

But why torment herself with sorrows beforehand ? After all, was not her career the fate of nearly all poor girls ? Their youth passed like a flower, and then all the rest of their life was one long misery. Happy they

who had had a little love not altogether brutal,—a few brief joys in their spring-time,—one sweet romance ! Henriette might even think herself one of the most favored ; for at least she was pretty,—pretty enough to please this young gentleman who was pressing her hands so hard and gently whispering such burning words against her neck. How seductive it all was, and how her woman's soul was flattered by everything in this high-bred youth, this child of wealth, with his clear, pale face, and his soft, coaxing voice !

Even then he had no idea how she longed for him, so inexperienced was he. So much had he to learn in the school of love, that he was already more than contented to touch her smooth skin and breathe the mysterious perfume of a woman. Virgin though she was, Henriette knew more than he did and was still more intoxicated than he was. She longed to embrace him, to clasp him in her arms, to inhale him like incense. She restrained her-

self as long as she could ; but at last, when the effort became more than she could bear, having looked round in the shadow to assure herself that nobody in the line of carriages was watching them, she silently placed her lips on the lips of the young man, and the two lovers, unseen amid the crowd, exchanged their first kiss under the solemn reverie of the stars.





CHAPTER VIII.

“A SUPERIOR OFFICER'S ROOM.”

THAT night it was long past twelve when Armand got back to his mother's house. As he made his way home from the other end of Vaugirard, intoxicated with his first love triumph, his victorious steps awoke the echoes of the silent streets in the bright May night.

That ever memorable evening! In thinking of what had passed, he was overwhelmed by his own boldness. Could it really be he who had dared to ask Henriette to let him go up to her room? Could it really be he whom she had piloted through the intricacies of the crazy staircase, leading him by the hand?

Oh! that room,—should he ever forget it!

Poor indeed was that fourth-floor apartment. Very gloomy the narrow parlor into which were crowded a stove with an elbow pipe, a round table, a sewing-machine, and the absent aunt's canopy bed folded up in a corner. Very miserable, too, the seamstress's little nook, where two colored figures—Gambetta and Garibaldi, a souvenir of the political opinions of the deceased father—were in very fine company with a brass crucifix and a branch of faded box hung over the pallet bed.

But amid all this poverty and squalor Armand had seen an unknown paradise open before him. He had just come away from it; he was still thrilling with the mystery that had been revealed to him; and he carried in his clothes, on his hands, in his boyish beard, the subtle perfume of the loving girl who, the moment before, had clasped him in her arms as if she could not let him go, and fastened her long, long, good-night kiss upon his lips.

as she stood on her door-step in charming dis-order, her sweet eyes glittering with happiness and tears.

The lovers had promised to meet again as soon as possible. But Henriette could not receive Armand at her own rooms in future. She had acted very imprudently in bringing him there at all. If it only concerned herself, God knows she would have laughed at the neighbors or at what anybody might say. But her aunt would soon return home from the convalescent asylum ; and she was an excellent woman, whom Henriette respected and to whom she would not give pain for anything.

Armand had, therefore, to look out for a bower for his sweetheart without any loss of time. Luckily, being an assiduous student and very methodical in his affairs, he had no want of money ; but he was none the less in a difficulty, through his ignorance of the resources of Paris in such matters. He made up his

mind to consult one of his fellow-students at the Law School, named Théodore Vernier.

This amiable youth, who was a little older than Armand, was in the habit of rallying him on his austere manners, and sometimes called him in jest "Mademoiselle Bernard." He, also, lived with his parents. But he was a spoilt child, whose fond mother allowed him every indulgence, with the natural result that he abused his opportunities. He already had a large circle of acquaintances in the Quartier Latin, smoked innumerable cigarettes, wrote verses according to the latest fashion, appeared at Bullier on the "correct" day, and enjoyed quite a celebrity at several taverns of doubtful reputation, where noisy women dispensed execrable beer. Though he had been well brought up and knew how to preserve the tone of good society when necessary, he had awakened an instinctive distrust in Madame Bernard the first time she saw him. She often used to say to her son :

"I don't much like your friend. He gives me the impression of a thorough rake."

The day after his adventure with Henriette, Armand hastened to Théodore Vernier's house, and found him in the act of ransacking the dictionary for a fourth rhyme for "erbe," to fix into an inflammatory sonnet with which he hoped to conquer the susceptible heart of a stout brunette of the name of Flo, short for Florestine, who adorned, for a quarter of an hour at a time, a small beer-shop in the Rue Monsieur le Prince, decorated in Japanese style, and much frequented by a group of young poets of the fleshly school.

Théodore welcomed his blushing comrade's confession with a merry peal of laughter.

"Bravo! 'Mademoiselle'!" he cried; "accept my hearty congratulations! You are just in the nick of time, too. My last sweetheart but one has taken a fit of jealousy; and if the quarters we used to occupy are still available,—they are far enough away and in a highly

respectable house,—they would be the very thing for you. Let us go and look at them."

It was rather a large room, clean, fairly well furnished, and supplied with light and air by two windows looking on one of the grand avenues that surround the Invalides,—“a superior officer's room,” to use the expression of the lodging-house keeper, who often had dealings with the military. By Théodore's advice, Armand got rid of an afflicting “chromo” representing *M. Thiers declared the Liberator of France by the arms of three hundred Deputies*, and, to make the place look more comfortable and homelike, ordered two lamps, a carpet, and a few growing plants. Then, having paid a month's rent in advance and again thanked his friend most warmly, he returned home, delighted with having secured this snug retreat.

The doorkeeper handed him Henriette's first letter.

Such good news! She had got the place

she wanted at Madame Pamela's,—the great dressmaker,—and was to go there the following day, Tuesday.—What she did not tell him was that she was only too glad not to have to make her appearance again at Madame Bernard's; for she could not have seen Armand's mother without dying of shame.—If Armand was disengaged at half-past eight in the evening, when she came out of the shop, she would meet him under the arcades of the Rue de Rivoli, in front of the Continental Hotel. The letter ended with a few words of love and kisses that Armand read with a delicious swelling of the heart. It was little he cared, you may be sure, for Henriette's original style of spelling or washerwoman's handwriting.

Armand very seldom went out in the evening, and so, that his mother should not be surprised by his change of habits, he lied to her,—alas! for the first time in his life,—and made up a story about having to attend a

conference of students. The next day he was punctual at the rendezvous.

Henriette had been at work all day at the celebrated workshop in the Rue Castiglione, which is so well known among ladies of the highest fashion. But as soon as the evening meal was over,—the work-people dined on the premises,—she hurried in double-quick time, folded up her napkin, put on her hat, wished everybody good-night, and, gliding out like a swallow, flitted away under the arcades. Armand had been waiting a quarter of an hour for her. She recognized his slim outline long before she got up to him, and they went off at once, arm in arm, with their hands clasped, touching one another as much as possible, as light as a dream, in the direction of their nest of love.

For a fortnight they met in this way almost every evening, and they lived an enchanted life.

How they loved one another ! Oh, how

fondly they loved one another ! Yes, with all the wild delight of new-born passion, with all the swift, insatiable rapture of young doves. But so tenderly, too ! To Armand, Henriette was not merely the Woman, the Chimera who fires the imagination of every grown man, and who at last had seized and conquered him ; she was already his dearly beloved one, his only loved one,—that heart's treasure whom you can see when far away, by only closing your eyes, and the thought of whom haunts you every moment, takes possession of you, flows in your very blood, and envelopes your very soul. Everything about his gentle little lover appealed to the student's deepest and tenderest feelings. His strongest passions were aroused by the charms of her person, so delicate and pure, with all the grace of childhood still hovering around her. But to this natural ardor of a young man in the prime of his desire there was added a sentiment of profound affection, made up of gratitude and of gener-

ous pity, for this simple-minded and unselfish maiden who, without any design or any defence, had given him, as if it had been a rose, as soon as he smiled on her, the only treasure she possessed,—the flower of her youth and innocence. And, like a true-hearted, honorable boy as he was, he took a solemn oath to his conscience that he would love her all the days of his life.

As for Henriette, she abandoned herself to her passion with that precious faculty of living for the passing hour, that not altogether unwise recklessness, which is the privilege of the simple and the ignorant. When the day came—the inevitable day—when she would be separated from Armand,—well, there would be no more happiness for her in this world, that was all ! In the mean time she enjoyed her happiness madly—to the very last possibility of enjoyment. Sometimes it seemed too much for her. It was like something of incalculable value that had been put in her hand, but

that she did not know the use of. Poor child ! She felt bewildered as a beggar might who had asked for a penny and received a star.

She was adored like the most beloved of mistresses, yet she displayed the timid submission of a slave. For some days she could not make up her mind to call her lover "thee" and "thou." He laughed at her good-naturedly about it, and Henriette's awkward efforts to treat him more as an equal gave him exquisite pleasure. Sometimes, in a moment of excitement, she called him by some term of endearment not commonly used in polite society, or let out "my darling" or "my treasure," or some such familiar phrase. Armand thought it very sweet; but Henriette was overcome with shame, and threw herself on the young man's breast and kissed his neck to hide her blushes. She was so afraid of not being "proper" enough for him. In spite of his love for her, she felt she was his inferior. She often took his slender, white, aristocratic

hand in hers, looked at it for a long time with the sensation of touching something very rare and precious, and always ended by raising it to her lips and giving it a delicate, respectful kiss.

Seeing her so humble and timid, so helpless before the world, the youth of yesterday, whom she had made a man, reflected with a softened pride that this fragile creature belonged to him, and was dependent on him, and that henceforward it was his duty to defend and protect her.

How they loved one another ! How happy they were together ! To complete their intoxication, it happened that their youthful idyl had for setting and scenery a succession of sublime summer nights, when the dark blue firmament displayed its infinite depths, when, amid the luminous rivers of the Milky Way, the planets shone like beacons and the stars arrayed their glittering hosts.

About eleven o'clock the two lovers emerged

from their secret retreat, and Armand took Henriette home by way of the wide, empty suburban boulevards. The air was balmy, and the long rows of trees, now in full leaf, exhaled a fresh odor of the night. The dome of the Invalides stood out darkly against the sky, its golden scales shining here and there in the starlight.

But for the murmur of the mighty city, sounding far away like the hum of a bee, what perfect silence! The two lovers, walking very slowly, with their arms round one another, tired out with happiness, advanced into the solitude. The fulness of their joy was such that they believed all nature shared it with them; and when they stopped for a moment to gaze around them, they thought the vast avenues, the lofty buildings, the leafy depths, the heavens above with their flowers of light, heaved with them a deep sigh of happiness and young desire.



CHAPTER IX.

'TWIXT DUTY AND LOVE.

IT was from this bright dream that Armand had just been rudely awakened.

His mother knew all, his dear good mother whom he loved with all his heart, but whose jealous nature and whose despotic and passionate disposition he was only too well aware of. He foresaw that something terrible was going to happen and that a great deal of suffering was in store for both of them.

He was right. The struggle began immediately.

According to his regular custom, Armand went to see his mother in her boudoir, a little while before the dinner-hour. He entered the room that day for the first time with downcast eyes, heavy brows and a heart full of anguish

and confusion. But when he found Madame Bernard sitting in her usual place before her tapestry canvas, he saw all his happy childhood again in a flash of memory and imagination. Unable to bear the thought that there was an obstacle, a wall, between his mother and himself, or that he was not her only and well-beloved son, as before, he sprang towards her with outstretched arms and trembling hands, and a look that implored her pardon.

She, however, checked him with a sharp gesture, a gesture of refusal, and threw in his face a "No, I beg of you," which recalled the young man to the sorrowful reality and froze the very blood in his veins.

The servant having announced that dinner was served, they passed into the dining-room and sat down silently at table.

This evening meal had always been the happiest time of the day for them. They talked of the various events of the day, laid their plans for the morrow, and enjoyed the

relaxation of a kindly and confidential conversation. But this evening, two invisible guests, Anger and Shame, had placed themselves at the family table. Mother and son scarcely touched the dishes that were put before them, and spoke not a word to one another. They returned to the boudoir, where two lamps, which had been lighted too early, were burning dimly in the solemn twilight of the long summer day. As soon as the servant, having brought coffee, left them alone together, Madame Bernard suddenly broke silence and said to her son in a bitter tone :

“ You are going to your conference this evening, are you not ? ”

He had, in truth, an appointment with Henriette, and, blushing in the darkness, he could only stammer in his confusion :

“ Mother ! ”

Then Madame Bernard broke out.

“ Go,” she cried, trembling with rage. “ Go, and meet your mistress. Henceforward you

need not tell any lies on that subject. For you have lied, you have deceived me shamefully. Ah, you have made a good beginning with your love-affairs ! That girl has already made you behave basely. I tremble to think what the miserable wretch will make of you or what disgrace she will lead you into. Go and meet her, my boy. Do not let me detain you."

But she checked herself when she heard her son sobbing.

" You are crying !" she said, in a softer voice.

He threw himself at her feet and covered her hands with kisses and tears.

" Forgive me, darling mother," he murmured. " Forgive me, mamma, for having caused you pain. But if you only knew ! I love her ! "

This word instantly stopped the tendency to yield which was gaining on Madame Bernard's heart.

“ You love her ! ” she said,—and her voice rang with fierce sarcasm—“ you love my dress-maker ! But, you unhappy child, you cannot be serious. You must be out of your mind ! I had hoped, yes, I had been foolish enough to believe, that you would pass purely and proudly through the temptations of youth, until the day when I should have married you to some beautiful girl. That was my illusion, I confess, and you have cruelly dispelled it. Still, I was not unreasonable. I was ready to excuse an irresistible impulse, an act of passion. I know well enough that young men will be young men. But you ! You ! To run after the first petticoat that came by ! To pay attention to this seamstress, a common girl like that, scarcely even a pretty girl ! Really, I thought you had better taste ! But that is enough ! I should lower my dignity as a mother and a modest woman if I were to say anything more about such indecency. With your permission, we will never open our lips on the subject

again. I have been wrong even to get angry about it and to reproach you. Let me hope that you will not be long before you reproach yourself much more severely than I have done. A baggage whom I have been kind to ! A wretched little schemer whom I had sheltered and brought under my roof, and who took advantage of it to seduce my son ! No, Armand, you cannot be serious. You do not know what you are saying. Very soon, tomorrow perhaps, when you have had time for reflection and when your detestable passion has passed away, you will blush for having dared to tell me that you love this girl ! ”

How badly she managed matters, poor woman ! What a mistake she made in wounding her son on the side of his love ! Already he was no longer on his knees ; he was no longer weeping on her hands, seeking to conciliate her by his childlike caresses. He had sprung to his feet, quivering with excitement, and in



"NOT ANOTHER WORD; DO YOU HEAR ME, SIR!"

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a hoarse voice and with dry eyes, but still respectfully, he said :

“ I implore you, mother, do not speak to me in such a way ! You do not know the poor girl, and you do her an injustice ! Since I cannot defend her without confessing everything, I may tell you that I am the first——”

But he could not finish his sentence. Madame Bernard burst out laughing,—an insulting laugh that was fearful to hear. Then, drawing herself up to her full height before her son and covering him with a furious look, she cried in a tone of command :

“ Not another word : do you hear me, sir ! ”

That “ sir,” which she had used to him for the first time, cut the young man like a stroke of a knife.

“ Not one more word ! ” she went on. “ I see that you are more deceived, more completely blinded, than I had supposed. Keep your confessions to yourself, and leave me.

This damsel is waiting for you, no doubt, and a gentleman should never be late."

And leaving Armand speechless with grief, Madame Bernard fled into her bedroom.

She remained there a long time in darkness. She felt a hurricane of anger, a tempest of hatred, rising and thundering in her heart and brain, against this Henriette, this worthless woman who had robbed her of her son's innocence, and, as she believed, of his love as well. At this moment she recalled only too plainly the sewing-girl's pretty profile, her reserved manner, her natural grace. No! This little creature was neither ugly nor vulgar. She might well please Armand and gain his love. The thought of it filled her with rage,—the mother with her yearning heart, the widow neglected in time past by her brutal husband. She detested Henriette like an enemy, like a rival.

Then, for a few minutes, Madame Bernard des Vignes, the pious and high-principled woman, who had lived in the best society and

shone at the Court in her day, became once more the savage peasant of the marshes of Sartène. She was the daughter of old Antonini, and she felt her Corsican blood rushing through her veins, boiling with fury and eager for the *vendetta*. If by any possibility she could have seen her son's mistress appear before her eyes at that moment, she would have flown at her like a wild beast and mangled her face with a stiletto.

This frightful impulse startled her out of her sleep, as it were. She drove it away with horror, and with a feeling of disgust and pity for herself. Then she thought of her son with a sudden feeling of indulgence, a thoroughly maternal weakness. She had been too severe. Youth must have its way. Her Armand had a good heart, and he loved her in spite of all. Even if he had a little tenderness for this Henriette, it would not last. Besides, she would never believe that Armand had been the girl's first lover. A daily seamstress,

going and coming when she pleased ! In Paris ! Nonsense ! Her son would soon free himself from such a connection. The tastes and habits of this street girl would grate upon him sooner or later.

Who could tell ? Perhaps it was all over already. Was he not capable of sacrificing this whim of his for the sake of his mother's peace of mind ? Why, yes ! A hundred times, yes ! Perhaps he was already thinking of that ! Perhaps while she was torturing herself, he was still there, not half a dozen steps away from her, devoured by remorse, poor child ! and ready to promise, to swear, that it was all at an end !

Intoxicated with this sudden hope, she turned and ran into her boudoir. Armand was no longer there. The servant came in with the evening papers.

"Has Monsieur Armand gone out ?" she asked, hoping he would say : No, he was still at home, he had just gone into his room.

"Yes, madame," the cold voice of the footman replied, "Monsieur Armand went out a quarter of an hour ago."

Thoroughly discouraged, Madame Bernard let herself drop into her easy-chair and abandoned herself to the thread of her sorrowful reflections. It seemed to her—and it was a feeling almost of physical pain—that something had broken or given way in her heart. She glanced mechanically at the panel of the wall in front of her, at a portrait of herself in full ball-costume, which her husband had had painted by Dubufe during their short honeymoon. And in the picture, veiled in shadow, she seemed to see the spectre of her youth and beauty. What was it that sent ringing through her head the prelude of that waltz of Strauss which they played when her father presented her at the Tuileries?

Come, come! Courage! She must shake off this burden and think of something else. She tore open the evening paper and unfolded

it ; and on the first page a name met her eyes that made her start.

Colonel de Voris, who was then in Tonquin, where he had the command of one of the columns of the expeditionary force, had just been made a general, after a succession of brilliant feats of arms against the Black Flags.

Monsieur de Voris ! How harsh she had been to that noble soldier, that perfect gentleman ! She called to mind his long fidelity, his respectful patience. He was the only man who had ever come so near to her heart. And yet, entirely on account of Armand, she had rejected him and sent him into exile. What had he gone for, to that deadly climate, that obscure and inglorious war ? Forgetfulness, perhaps death. One of these days—oh ! it was frightful to think of !—she would hear that this hero, who loved her so well, had died in those fetid swamps, burnt alive with fever, or, perhaps, tortured and mutilated by those yellow men. And it would be her fault, entirely

her fault ; for it was she who had driven Monsieur de Voris to despair, in order to devote herself to this ungrateful son, who now turned round upon her.

“Ah, cruel child ! ”

She had touched the lowest depths of melancholy. She let the paper fall on the carpet. In front of her, in the half-darkness, which seemed to change its attitude, the life-like portrait was gazing at her with sad, reproachful eyes. It was weeping over her and lamenting that she had so spoilt and wasted her life. Outside, the great city, which never sleeps, was sending up its eternal roar. And Madame Bernard came back to the thought which she could not get rid of. At that very moment, somewhere in that mighty Paris, her son was in the arms of his mistress, in the arms of a woman whom he loved better than he did her. Suddenly, hiding her face in her hands, the poor mother wept scalding tears.

Alas ! alas ! It is the law of nature. The

little bird gains strength, his plumes have grown, he spreads his wings. Impatient for liberty, he leans over the edge of the nest, and, for all his mother's piercing cries, he flies away, he flies away !





CHAPTER X.

ABSENCE MAKES THE HEART GROW FONDER.

DAYS and weeks passed away, but the situation remained the same between Madame Bernard and Armand.

In appearance they had made peace. The second time she saw him come to her with his arms out, she had not the heart to repel him. They kissed one another morning and evening. But this kiss was as much a punishment for one as for the other. She could not help shuddering at the touch of her son's lips, fresh as they were under his downy moustache. She thought she could feel there—she actually did feel—the caresses of “the other,” that woman whom she hated so much. Sometimes she could hardly resist wiping her face after

Armand had kissed her. As for him, he no longer felt the kindly warmth of former days on her pale face, her cold cheek, which she presented to him with such an air of restraint, almost of resignation.

Madame Bernard never said anything more to her son about his love-affair. She never mentioned Henriette's name. Why not? From womanly modesty and motherly pride. From policy also, perhaps. She was afraid of irritating the young man and of widening the breach that already existed between them. She thought it wiser to be silent and to exercise patience. She never spoke of his love-affair; but he guessed, he knew, that she thought of nothing else, that she thought of it unceasingly, and in his mother's slightest words he suspected a double meaning or an allusion, and fancied he could detect a complaint or a sarcasm.

There was one particularly painful moment in the day. It was in the evening, after din-

ner, at the same hour when they had had their first explanation. Madame Bernard sat at her eternal tapestry, and without raising her eyes from her work she said to Armand, in a choking voice, in which fear seemed mingled with entreaty :

“Are you going out?”

Most frequently he replied softly :

“No, mamma.” For he had arranged his meetings with Henriette at longer intervals than at first. He had summed up courage enough for that. He had accounted for this to his humble lover, who accepted everything he told her and submitted to all his wishes. He said he had neglected his law studies for some time past, for her sake, and that he must prepare for his examination. Madame Bernard, however, appeared to give her son no credit for this concession, which he thought very heroic, but simply seemed to take it for granted that he had his reasons for staying at home.

In other respects, they had very little to say to one another, and merely exchanged a few words on subjects of no importance. It was an effort, almost amounting to suffering, to keep up this conversation from which all confidence was banished.

At the end of a quarter of an hour, Armand would cut matters short by saying :

"Good night, mamma, I am going to work."

She would offer him her stony cheek, and he would retire wearily to his room.

But as Henriette was engaged all day at Madame Pamela's, he could only see her in the evening; and often when the dreaded question came : "Are you going out?" he was obliged to reply : "Yes." Then his mother would heave a sigh that crucified him, and he would go out knowing that he had left her solitary and broken-hearted, and feeling that he was an undutiful son.

The poor boy was nothing worse than a lover. As soon as he arrived at the place of

meeting, as soon as he saw Henriette hurrying towards him under the arcades and smiling from afar,—the truth must be told,—all was forgotten. He no longer had any pleasure in life except the happy hours he spent with his little sweetheart. At first, not wishing to make her uneasy, he had not told her anything about his quarrel with his mother. But can two lovers who are really fond of one another keep a secret long? One day, when Armand's heart was too heavy, he confided all to Henriette.

She was terrified. The struggle between her and Madame Bernard seemed too unequal. She trembled when she recalled that stately mother, that handsome lady with the stern eyes, whom she had offended, after all, and who must have so many means of compelling her son's obedience and vanquishing her, poor little thing. It was true, Armand assured her of his constancy and swore to love her forever, in spite of all obstacles.

He never spoke of his mother, nevertheless, without great affection and profound respect. She had always had great influence over him, and some day or other she was sure to prevail upon him to break off his love-affair. The very thought of such a thing made Henriette feel as if she should die. Not see Armand any more ! Lose him altogether ! For her, that would be like extinguishing the sun !

She concealed her fears, however, and controlled herself so as always to show a cheerful face to her lover. He was so kind and affectionate that little by little she regained confidence. At last a decisive test—absence—enabled her to prove the strength of her hold upon Armand's heart.

It was the beginning of the month of August. The student had just got successfully through his second examination for the law, and the time had come when Madame Bernard and her son were to go, as they did every year, to spend three months at Les Trem-

bleaux, a fine property belonging to them in Mayenne.

The two women looked forward anxiously to the time for this separation. The mother looked forward to it with hope, the mistress with alarm.

"Will he forget her?" thought one, in a moment of gloomy joy.

"Will he forget me?" said the other to herself, with a sudden pang that swelled her heart almost to bursting.

Armand had gently prepared Henriette for his departure. It was as cruel a trial for him as for his mistress to have to give up those happy evenings in their bower of love, and those delightful walks under the kindly light of starry nights. And oh, how long it seemed, this banishment! But the dutiful son could not refuse to go with his mother; and after a farewell meeting, at which the lovers exchanged the most ardent promises and shed a flood of tears, he was compelled to go.

Oh ! how wearily the time passed for poor Henriette, and how miserable she was, left all alone in Paris in the dog-days, with nothing but empty streets, parched and broiling, and silent houses with the blinds drawn ! How monotonous and tedious the interminable day seemed, working in an atmosphere like a Russian bath, while the perspiring sewing-girls droned their stupid, hackneyed music-hall choruses ! The poor child had nothing to hurry for now, after the evening meal. No one was waiting for her under the arcades. Where was her “dear heart” now ? What was he doing ? Was he thinking of her ? When she went home, she still took the longest way round, the walk she always took on Armand’s arm—*their* walk. But it had lost all its charm. Formerly she saw so much beauty in the triumphal scene of the Place de la Concorde, glowing in the setting sun, the great river flowing under the sculptured arches, the vast esplanade overshadowed by the gigan-

tic gold casque of the Invalides ! Now this long walk was nothing but a weary trudge.

Towards nightfall she passed the house where she had spent the only happy hours of her life. She waited a minute and raised her eyes to the closed shutters of *their* room. Ah ! the souls in purgatory must raise a look like that to the closed gates of paradise ! It seemed an eternity since Armand went away, and yet—yes, she counted the days on her fingers—it was scarcely a week. When would they go up that dark staircase together again, with their arms round one another ? When would they double-lock themselves again in the “superior officer’s room,” as Armand used laughingly to call it, using the landlady’s expression ? When would she see the red velvet furniture again, with its crochet-work covers, or the clock-face with its gilt zinc finger pointing to the figures on a terrestrial globe ? When would she renew her acquaintance with the *Eve of Austerlitz* and the

Farewell at Fontainebleau, in their fly-blown frames?

Then, when the gas-lamps began to loom through the growing darkness, she renewed her solitary walk. Sometimes a young officer in plain clothes, who had run up to Paris from the Military School on the chance of finding a sweetheart, would slacken his pace when he met the pretty dressmaker ; but when he saw her sorrowful eyes, he would pass on and abandon all idea of an adventure. Then Henriette would go on her way through the deserted avenues, where the hot breath of the boisterous wind was whirling round her the first dry leaves, the dead leaves that are a melancholy sign of the too precocious autumn of Paris.

She would have pined away and ended by making herself ill with grief if she had not received a letter from Armand every week. He could not write to her at her lodgings, on account of her aunt. But every Sunday Henriette, who had no work to do on that day,

ran to the post-office in front of the Petit Luxembourg, to get her letter, her precious letter, and then hurried into the park to read it. Ah ! the shopmen who were out for their Sunday walk in that favorite resort might laugh as they pointed the pretty girl out to one another, absorbed in her reading. Henriette did not trouble her head about them. She walked slowly up and down under the chestnut-trees that had already shed half their leaves, along the flower borders on the terrace, past the marble statues of the queens, and read, and read, twenty times over, the four pages in which her absent darling had poured out all his love. It was the poor girl's only support, her sacrament, this weekly letter, every word of which warmed and comforted her heart. She carried it in her bosom all the week, and read it every night before she went to sleep.

It was a serious business, however, having to answer it. From the Luxembourg she went

straight home, and in the afternoon, when her aunt was at vespers, she seated herself at a corner of the dining-table, laid out her paper and a little bottle of ink, chose a new pen, wetted it between her lips, and then fell into a dream and could not think of anything to say. She was not so much ashamed of her bad writing and faulty spelling now, because Armand had told her over and over again that he liked them, that he liked everything that came from her! But she never knew how to invent these graceful phrases, these delicate ways of saying "I love you." The first few lines of her reply were always awkward and constrained. But she was soon carried away by her feelings, and wrote to her lover as if he were there and she were speaking to him; and then, letting her pen go its own way, she would unconsciously make the happiest choice of words, and often use the most striking images. For example: One day when she wished to reassure Armand, who had grown almost jealous in exile and

had asked her anxiously, “Are you really and truly mine alone?” she replied with passionate eloquence: “I am yours, my own loved one, as if I were a knife in your pocket, ready either to kill a man or to peel a pear, for your sake.”

How happy she would have been if she had but known how Armand pined and suffered down there at Les Trembleaux, for want of her! That faithful fellow too was counting the days and the hours. Entirely on account of Henriette, he kept to himself, and declined, whenever he could, to go to parties at the neighboring country-houses, where his mother wished him to appear. It was only from thinking of his dear little sweetheart that he shut himself up in the antique library and walked up and down for hours before the dusty shelves, or sometimes spent the whole afternoon wandering under the solemn beech-trees in the great park. It was because Henriette was far away from him that he no longer had any liking

for the beautiful landscape or the old home which, nevertheless, recalled to him the sweetest recollections of his childhood. It was because Henriette was not there, that the graceful château, with its architecture of the Renaissance and its handsome façade mirrored in the lake where the swans were, seemed to Armand as dark and dismal as a prison surrounded by a ditch.

As for Madame Bernard des Vignes, she was as unhappy and worried as she could be. Armand was devoted in his attentions to her ; but she felt that he was thinking of his mistress all the while, that their separation had made no change in the state of his affections, that the enemy was not conquered. The jealous mother was in despair. Several times, when in conversation with her son, she tried to open that painful subject again, or at least to make some allusion to it. But Armand only turned red and lowered his eyes, and always took refuge in a respectful but gloomy silence.

September, however, had come and had filled the orchards with ripe fruit. The grapes had turned to gold on the vines. October had come with its morning mists. It had passed and gone. Already the trees were covered with yellow leaves. Then, at length came All Saints' Day, and one morning the autumn rains set in, cold and pitiless.

Madame Bernard had no longer any reasons to give her son for keeping him in the country. The lectures at the Law School were about to open again. There was nothing for it but to return to Paris and take up their abode again in the apartment on the Quai Malaquais.

From the very day when they came back, the bitter struggle was renewed.

They had risen from table, and Madame Bernard had sat down to her tapestry.

“Are you going out?”

“Yes, mamma.”

Her son was still this Henriette's lover !
Oh, how she hated her !



CHAPTER XI.

IN THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

BUT there is something else to think about besides love, now. Armand is ill, seriously ill! Armand's life is in danger.

He was seized six weeks after his return to Paris. Madame Bernard had a distinct recollection that, for some days before, he looked uneasy and excited. He began by complaining of headache and putting his hand to his forehead every moment, as if it were weighing him down.

"Why, what is the matter with you?" his mother had asked, getting frightened. "You are flushed in the face. I don't like that. It is not your natural color."

But he answered carelessly: "Bah! it will

soon pass away," shook his curly hair, as if to drive away his pain, and, in spite of his mother's repeated remarks on his condition, continued to go out in the evening to meet Henriette,—oh! that girl!—and this in the mud and wet, all through the foul December weather.

At last, one morning—the unhappy boy had not come home till after midnight—he rang for Louis, the footman, just before daybreak, and said to him, speaking with an effort:

"I have had a bad night. I am decidedly unwell. Go and bring my mother. I am thirsty. I am in a fever. Oh, how my head aches!"

The moment she heard this, Madame Bernard hastily put on a dressing-gown and ran to her son's bedside. His face was very much flushed, his forehead was burning, he was shivering under the bed-clothes, his teeth were chattering, and he was in a continual shudder.

Typhoid fever! Could it be the dreaded typhoid? It was prevalent in Paris at the time, almost epidemic. Madame Bernard remembered now that she had read that in the papers. Young people, moreover, were especially liable to the disease, and it was most formidable for those who had exhausted their strength. Could it be that? Oh, Lord God! Could it be that?

Madame Bernard rang the bell frantically. The house was speedily awakened from top to bottom.

“Léontine!” she cried to the old house-keeper as she came in, buttoning her dress. “Léontine! Quick! Jump into a cab! Go for Doctor Forly! Ask him to come this instant, without a moment’s delay!”

There she remained powerless, not knowing what to do next, watching her son, who was burying his face in the pillows, and groaning with pain.

At last, in about a quarter of an hour, Léon-

tine appeared, followed by the family doctor, whom she had fortunately caught just as he was getting into his carriage to go to his hospital.

He was an old practitioner, with methodical ways belonging rather to a past period, who solemnly wrote at the head of his directions : “I advise,” and who never failed to end his prescriptions with the cabalistic letters M.S.A. (*misce secundum artem*). But he was famous for the accuracy of his diagnosis and his unerring medical judgment.

He sat down by the bed while he slowly drew off his gloves, felt the invalid’s pulse, examined him closely, asked him a few questions, and then rose and said with a cheerful voice :

“I have seen many similar cases. We shall come through it well enough.”

But his hopeful words had a false ring ; and when he turned his head, Madame Bernard saw that he knitted his brows.

She gasped, and led him into the next room. Oh ! horror ! It was indeed as she had

feared ! It was typhoid fever ! The cautious old doctor was obliged to let Madame Bernard know the worst in the interest of the patient, so that no precautions might be neglected. He added, moreover, that the disease had declared itself with extreme violence. Then he wrote some prescriptions and promised to call again in a few hours.

During ten days — ten fearful, agonizing days ! — the fever increased and the patient grew weaker. The little thermometer that his mother put under his arm-pit every hour,—poor fellow ! the slightest movement exhausted him,—the merciless thermometer always showed frightful degrees of temperature. Thirty-nine ! Forty ! Forty-one ! If it went any higher than that, it meant death ! Oh, these doctors are all a set of blockheads ! They cannot do anything ! Doctor Forly, in whom Madame Bernard had such confidence, is no better than the rest ! Suppose he made a mistake ! Suppose he were wanting in cau-

tion or did not take active enough measures ! The doctor came several times a day, and looked graver every time, and always ordered his eternal sulphate of quinine. Such enormous doses ! Suppose he gave too much,—or not enough ! Why does not Doctor Forly try this treatment by ice-baths that is so much talked about and that seems to have effected such miraculous cures ? Madame Bernard wished to see other doctors, to call in some of the most famous men in the profession, whose cures were celebrated.

Three of them came at once, wrapped in heavy fur coats, in their comfortable carriages ; and the distracted mother looked eagerly for the flash of genius in their weary eyes, in their solemn, learned-looking faces. She tried to gather confidence from the ribbons in their button-hole, from their high-sounding titles of professor and academician, from their names that were known all over France. But as soon as they saw the patient,

her watchful eyes detected in their face that slight compression of the lips, that almost imperceptible grimace which she had so often seen Doctor Forly make, and it froze the very marrow in her bones. The doctors passed gravely into the parlor to hold a consultation among themselves ; and behind the closed door the mother listened, stiff with anguish, to the confused murmur of their voices. Blessed Virgin ! If they would only tell her soon that Armand is not in such great danger —that they could answer for his life ! Ah ! what joy ! She would be ready to die. But no. They made their appearance again with their sphinx-like look,—their faces as blank as a wall. She could get nothing out of them but the usual phrases : “We must wait a while. A favorable reaction may set in,” and a few cold words of hope. Misery of miseries ! Was her son going to die ?

He was getting worse. She could see it herself. The delirious attacks were contin-

uous. In that overheated room, reeking of drugs, Madame Bernard spent all the twenty-four hours of the day. She kept awake by sheer terror, sitting at the head of the bed, which seemed to exhale a vapor of fever, and in which the sufferer tossed and groaned more and more feebly. The nights were the worst. Bowed down in her chair by weariness and grief, the poor woman sometimes tried to pray. Ever since she first saw that her son was in danger, the Corsican had found in the depths of her soul all the religious fanaticism in which she had been brought up as a child. Masses were said for Armand every day at the Church of St. Thomas Aquinas, and Léontine was kept ceaselessly running about Paris to have candles burnt at the shrine of particular saints and at all the altars that were supposed to have special powers of healing. But neither votive offerings nor nine days' devotions had any effect; and Madame Bernard, though at the same moment she was distractedly passing

through her fingers a chaplet of beads that had been blessed by the Pope, felt her heart rising against Heaven with a paroxysm of revolt and blasphemy.

Sometimes, when the sufferer lay still for a while, there was a dense, deep silence in the dark room only lit by the pale flame of the tiny night-lamp. The only sound to be heard was the rapid ticking of the old Dresden clock on the mantel-piece : Tic-tac, tic-tac, tic-tac, tic-tac. Madame Bernard listened mechanically. How fast the time was going ! How the panting seconds seemed to fly ! How they hurried on ! And toward what unknown goal ? Tic-tac, tic-tac, tic-tac, tic-tac. What fatal hour were they in such haste to reach ? Tic-tac, tic-tac, tic-tac. Who was waiting for them at the rendezvous towards which they were galloping at this furious pace ? Holy Saviour ! Could it be Death ?

But suddenly Madame Bernard had risen. Her son had begun to make a slight move-

ment again. He had uttered a low, plaintive cry. She leaned over him anxiously, with a gesture as if she would spread her wings over him like a bird.

"How do you feel, my little Armand? Are you thirsty, my precious pet? Do you want anything? Tell me, darling,—do tell me!"

The sick man turned his sunken face, with his parched beard and his thin nostrils, and opened his eyes without seeing anything,—those great eyes that the fever had enlarged out of all proportion to his face. From the depth of his delirium, there came an indistinct murmur; and, with a sigh that seemed to swell from his very heart in tenderness, he breathed a woman's name:

"Henriette!"

Madame Bernard choked down a cry of rage. Henriette! He still was thinking of that Henriette! He saw her even in his delirious visions! He called upon her in his agony! But, if he died, it was she who would

be the cause ! Yes, it was she, the vile, lustful woman, who had gained possession of this unhappy boy through his sensual passions, had led him astray, worn him out with guilty pleasure, and left him without strength, broken down, enfeebled, an easy prey to the passing pestilence ! The doctors said it was so. The disease had found in Armand only too favorable a soil. He was already unnerved and exhausted when he took the fever. But for that, he would already be convalescent, out of danger, as good as cured. And she, his mother,—must she hear her dying son call for this Henriette ! Was it not enough to make her blood boil ! Oh, that cursed girl ! Oh, that strumpet who had murdered her boy !





CHAPTER XII.

THE DOORKEEPER'S LODGE.

THE friends of the Bernard des Vignes family soon came to know of Armand's illness. A large circle of Parisian society, the society of the Second Empire, among whom Madame Bernard was held in high esteem, were distressed to hear the bad news, and hastened to express their sympathy. Every moment a carriage stopped in front of the house on the Quai Malaquais. The footman jumped nimbly from the box, went into the janitor's room, asked after the patient, and left a card.

The handsome house, dating from the last century, where the Bernards lived, was not

provided, after the fashion of the present day, with an insolent ruler who reads the newspaper and warms his calves in a glazed parlor decorated with carved oak and cheap hangings. It was contented with an old-fashioned porter's lodge, where, at the end of a recess, might be seen the red eiderdown quilt of a conjugal bed, and where, twice a day, the odors of culinary operations, of which onions certainly formed the base, made themselves unpleasantly conspicuous. The janitress, Mother Renouf, was quite in keeping with the homely and patriarchal appearance of her abode. This stout dame was already past middle age. Her husband, a messenger in a government office, was only employed to wax the staircases every Saturday, so that she was almost always left alone to guard the house. In order to relieve the dulness of her sedentary life, she kept several warbling families of canaries and goldfinches, which inhabited a number of cages hung on hooks near the

front door in the daytime and placed on the top of the stove at night.

When people came to inquire after Armand Bernard, no matter whether they were masters or servants, Mother Renouf did not confine herself to communicating the doctor's bulletin, as the haughty functionaries would have done who condescend to act as gentlemen's gentlemen in the Avenue de l'Opéra or the Boulevard Haussmann. But, being both talkative and tender-hearted, she improved on these dry documents by sundry remarks of her own, and expatiated, as old servants will, on Madame Bernard's maternal anxieties and on the sufferings of the young and interesting invalid.

Every evening, as soon as she got out of the shop, Henriette went to Madame Renouf's lodge for news of Armand.

The last time she had seen him he was already suffering a good deal, and he had left her very much concerned about him, promis-

ing to write to her the next day. But one day passed and then another, without her seeing anything of the expected letter. She became so cruelly anxious that she plucked up courage and, all in a tremble, once more crossed the threshold of that house which she had such a dread of,—that house which contained the man whom she loved, and the woman who hated her.

Henriette had not been there for six months. She hoped that no one would recognize her.

But Mother Renouf had too good a memory, and as soon as she saw the sewing-girl she said:

“Ah ! is that you, Mam’zelle Henriette ! What a stranger you are ! You have no doubt come to ask how Madame Bernard’s son is getting on ? Ah ! not too well, poor boy ! It seems it’s an unmistakable case of typhoid fever.—Oh, dear me ! What’s this ? Why, whatever is the matter with the girl ? You are as white as a sheet ! Oh, my God ! She’s going to be ill !”

Henriette was, indeed, tottering under the blow. Mother Renouf made her sit down at once in her large easy-chair,—the chair where she dozed of an evening, near the cord which led from the street entrance. The next thing was to look for her bottle of peppermint-water, and, not being able to find it, she began to lose her head. But the fainting girl let her forehead fall on the good woman's shoulder, and, unable to contain her grief, burst into tears, exclaiming :

“ Armand ! my poor Armand ! ”

Ah ! Mother Renouf needed no fuller confession. She was puzzled for a moment ; but then she understood it all. The old woman had a kind heart, however ; no doubt, she had had her own love-affairs in her time. It gave her quite a turn to see this pretty young creature in such grief, and she did her best to restore her.

“ What, Mam'zelle Henriette ! Monsieur Armand is your sweetheart ! Well, that is

hard ! I am afraid you have made a great mistake there, my poor child. But that's not the question ; and, besides, you must not despair. He is very ill, it is true, but he has youth on his side. I would not mind betting he will get well. Come, come ! Cheer up ! Yes, yes, I know ! You feel such things very badly when you are in love. I have been through it myself ; for I can tell you I was not always an ugly old woman with nothing but a canary-bird to look after. What ! are you still crying ? Ah, well, let the tears flow. After all, that's the only thing that does you any good, poor little one."

The motherly old creature was so distressed to see the young girl weeping, that she almost wept herself, and, taking the pretty, tearful face to her capacious bosom, she rocked her gently as if she were cradling a child.

Mother Renouf, you were only an humble doorkeeper, and such a doorkeeper as would not be tolerated in a house that had any re-

spect for itself. Your lodge reeked of onions and the close smell of your bird-cages. You were only a very coarse and very vulgar old woman, and the compassionate nose that you bent over Henriette was all smeared with snuff. But blessings be upon you, Mother Renouf ; for under your yellow-flowered calico gown there was something very rare and precious, which is commonly called a good and feeling heart. Thanks to you, this daughter of the people, this poor loving child, whose fault had been so pardonable, but to whom the harshness of social laws forbade the consolation of embracing her lover in his agony, was able to rest her heavy brows for a moment on a woman's breast and feel the throb of maternal pity.

Every evening after that, Henriette came to get news of Armand from Mother Renouf. She came after she had done her day's work. For that is the way with the poor. Their heart may be full of grief or not, but they

have to work all the same to earn their living. Through the mud and fog of the winter night she hurried under the arcades of the Rue de Rivoli and crossed the deserted space of the Carrousel; and those who saw her dainty figure in the glare of the electric light, tripping along with eager step and petticoats tucked up, might have supposed, alas ! that she was hastening to meet her sweetheart at the rendezvous. But as soon as she reached the Pont des Arts, Henriette slackened her pace. Down there, on the quay, at a well-known window, she could make out from afar a feeble light. It was there that her beloved one was wrestling with Death. Then she was overwhelmed by a sudden terror, and waited a while, to put off the moment when she should enter Mother Renouf's lodge. The last news had been so fearful : " Intense feverishness. The patient is in a very excited state." Might not the next news be even more ominous and hopeless ?

This lasted for eight days, and during all that time the poor girl lived in an atmosphere of terror.

One of the work-people at Pamela's, however, who had had typhoid fever, and whom Henriette questioned about the dreadful disease, told her that after the ninth day the danger of death, if not actually removed, is greatly diminished. It is a popular delusion, but Henriette's fond hopes accepted it rapturously. She believed—she was only too anxious to believe—that Armand's youth would bring him victoriously out of the struggle, that he would recover, that he was already better. That evening she ran with a firmer step to the Quai Malaquais, and she almost had a feeling of confidence as she turned the handle of the lodge-door.

Great God! On the round table, beside the heap of visiting-cards, she did not see the sheet of paper, the doctor's bulletin the very sight of which used to fill her with dread, but

which she used to rush to, nevertheless, with such eager eyes ! Mother Renouf rose from her big chair with a broken-hearted look in her honest face, bent down her head and began to cry. Ah ! It was all over ! Armand was dead !

Yes, Armand was dead ! An invisible finger had beckoned him from among the crowd of human beings. A mysterious breath had passed over him. And that bright spirit, that heart burning with love, those dark eyes where the shadow of such sweet and lovely thoughts had flitted, that temple of youth and manly beauty, that flame of noble aspirations,—all, all had passed away in a moment, as in the dark azure of a September night a star falls, and goes out ! Armand was dead !

In a couple of days his young friends from the schools would be assembled round his grave. Théodore Vernier—sincere in his poetry this time—would read a few pathetic verses conveying a touching farewell. Then

the students would disperse by the wet, leafless avenues of the cemetery, plunged in that ephemeral grief of which youth alone is capable. And after that they would return to their work or their pleasure, and the memory of their comrade who was gone would vanish little by little from their mind.

Armand was dead ! Near the Invalides, there would soon be seen a yellow placard on the door of a furnished house. A few days later,— the “superior officer’s room” would return to its normal destination and be encumbered in every corner with regulation sabres and pairs of boots with spurs fixed in the heels. And the dull looking-glass, before which Henriette used to put on her bonnet before leaving, whilst Armand would surprise her with a last kiss on the back of her neck,— the green and wrinkled looking-glass would never again reflect a trace of those two charming faces.

Armand was dead ! Away over there, be-

yond the seas and the continents, away in the farthest East, General de Voris, sitting in his bamboo hut, would receive, a few weeks later, the obituary notice, spotted with post-marks and yellow with the smoke of quarantine; and he would reflect, with bitter sadness, that the only woman he had ever loved, had sacrificed him to this child who was not destined to live.

Armand was dead! Beside the pillow,—where rested his weary head, his pale face, to which, a few hours after his last sigh, there had come back a serene and youthful beauty,—his mother, surrounded by women in mourning,—his mother, frightful to look at, writhed in her tragic grief and uttered cries like a wild beast in its death-throes, like the inarticulate baying of Hecuba.

Below, in the porter's lodge, on the bed from which the red eiderdown quilt had been removed,—Henriette lay stretched at full length, with her dress open at the neck, and

her face wet with tears. She had swooned twice in Mother Renouf's arms, and that good soul was bathing her temples with vinegar, and singing to her as if she had been a sick child.





CHAPTER XIII.

RIVALRY AT THE GRAVE.

AFTER Armand's death, there was a veritable conspiracy of pity amongst all who knew Madame Bernard des Vignes, in order to prevent the unhappy mother from being alone with her despair, and in order to keep her surrounded by friends and provided with distractions. It was then that she reaped the reward of her dignified and spotless life, finding real friends in people whom she had only supposed to be worldly acquaintances, and discovering deep and genuine qualities in women whom, until then, she had thought altogether superficial. The solitude in which she had

resolved at first to bury herself, yielding to a fierce impulse of pride and misery, was gently invaded by the kindly attentions of her friends, who found a way to speak to her of her loss without reopening her wounds. More humble since this great grief had felled her, she appreciated the sweetness of sympathy, the relief of feeling friendly hands placed on hers, of laying her head to rest on the shoulder of a tender-hearted confidante. If they could not console her, at least they calmed her and made her life less insupportable.

She would not allow Armand's body to be removed into the country and buried beside his father. She still had relations at Paris; and it was at Paris that, during his illness, she had felt a warm current of friendship and affection circulating round her. It was there, too, that she was to pass her life thenceforward, since she must live on; and she was determined not to be separated from her dear child's grave.

She had a very plain tomb built for him in the cemetery of Montparnasse, but was so broken-down with grief and exhaustion for a long time that she was unable to supervise the work herself ; and when, six weeks after Armand's death, his coffin was moved from the temporary cell to his final resting-place, Madame Bernard had not yet sufficient strength or courage to be present at the melancholy ceremony.

On the following Sunday, however, finding herself a little stronger, she wished to go and pray for the first time at her son's tomb, and, having heard mass at St. Thomas Aquinas, she got into her carriage, which was filled with bouquets and wreaths, and drove to the cemetery. She was so anxious to make this pilgrimage quite alone that she even declined to allow old Léontine to accompany her. Having ascertained the exact situation of the monument, she got out of her carriage, went into the cemetery, veiled in black from head

to foot, with her hands laden with tributes of grief, looked about her for the right path, and, having passed several rows of tombs, read from a distance—ah ! with what wringing of the heart !—the name of Armand Bernard cut in the fresh stone.

But all at once she stopped short. Her shoulders, which had been bent with grief, suddenly straightened themselves, and in her eyes, hollow from weeping, there sprang up a flash of anger.

Some one had been there before her. Her flowers were not the first offering !

Already there lay on Armand's tomb a little bunch of violets such as you may buy in the streets for a penny, and they could not have been there long, because the humble flowers were still quite fresh in their frill of ivy-leaves.

Madame Bernard des Vignes could not have a moment's doubt. They came from that Henriette !

Since Armand's death, the unhappy mother

had done all she possibly could to avoid thinking of her son's mistress.

She wished to cherish only the image of him in his purity, to recall him only as he was when adorned by chastity and innocence. The last six months of Armand's life, his connection with a girl unworthy of him, the struggle which he had had with his mother on account of this Henriette, this act of sensual folly,—for she would have it that it was nothing more,—all that soiled and tarnished his memory, and was far too painful to think of now that he was gone. She wished to shut it out from her thoughts as if it had never taken place, and she had almost succeeded in doing so. Yet here was this hateful, shameful past, rising up before her again !

That wretched girl, whose embraces had perhaps been actually fatal to Armand, dared to lay flowers on his tomb. And by what right ? What claim had she on his memory ? Because she had loved him ? Was that worthy

of being called love, the ungoverned passion of a street girl in spring-time? Because she still loved him? No such thing. The sentimentalism of a flirt, who would think no more about him in a month or a fortnight; but who would console herself with another lover! No, no, she could not bear it! She, his mother, with her heart pierced by the seven swords of suffering!—how could she allow this bunch of flowers to lie beside her own? She would not have the tribute of a courtesan, who had come there full of impure memories and scarcely able to make a pretence of weeping, to sully that stone which she, his mother, was approaching with her heart riven by sobs and prayers! Away with her obscene flowers! Away with them to the dunghill or the rubbish heap!

Madame Bernard leaned down to throw the flowers away, but she did not carry out her intention.

To despoil a grave! It was little short of

sacrilege! If her son saw her! Alas! this humble offering was very sweet, perhaps, to him who was sleeping there forever. Who could tell but that the first flowers which had beautified his sepulchre were not dearer to him than those his sorrowing mother had brought? Ah! it was a cruel thought!

But Madame Bernard remembered now that she had come there to pray. She reproached herself for having given way to her vindictive feelings in such a place. She fell on her knees, and made the sign of the cross. Yes, the hour had come for all forgiveness. Yes, when she thought of her poor dead son, she could remember nothing but that he had been for twenty years her consolation, her pride, her joy. Yes, she ought to have had more mercy for this young girl, who, after all, perhaps, had loved her Armand sincerely, and who, in any case, had not yet forgotten him, since she had faithfully laid these flowers there.

When Madame Bernard, after remaining long in prayer, rose to go, and cast a last, long, lingering look at the grave, Henriette's bouquet was still in its place.

After that, Madame Bernard went every Sunday to the cemetery, and every time she had proof that Henriette had brought her perfumed souvenir there since the morning.

Time slipped away. With the seasons, the flowers changed; but they were always the common sorts that are sold from little hand-carts beside the pavement in the poorest quarters of the city. The violets were succeeded by handfuls of wall-flowers, branches of lilac, bunches of roses. Before such constancy, Madame Bernard gradually laid aside her hatred. Was this Henriette's feeling stronger and more lasting than she had supposed, then? Why not? Armand was so lovable, so attractive! In her sorrow for her dead son, the mother became more lenient towards her he had loved. If some day she had met the

young girl, perhaps she would have thrown herself into her arms and treated her as an equal in grief. However, at each change of flowers, Madame Bernard experienced a strange feeling of uneasiness. She was always jealous of Henriette, jealous of her fidelity and of her grief, and in her sorrow she was still her rival.

The friends who had formed themselves into a league round Madame Bernard, however, continued their work. After long persuasion, they had prevailed on her to lead a less retired and unsociable life. Yielding to their patient and kindly solicitations, she had consented to see some company at her own house, to pay a few visits, and even to be present sometimes at very select parties.

A year had already passed since Armand was no more. The flowers that Henriette brought were chrysanthemums now, and Madame Bernard often found them powdered with snow. A grief such as this poor mother's could not be consoled ; but, thanks to time, it

became less acute, less violent. This grief, which could not but be eternal, was, nevertheless, not continual.

“To forget! to forget! is the secret of life!”

as Lamartine has said in an admirable line, which expresses a bitter truth. Certainly, Madame Bernard did not forget ; but at least she lived.

A few weeks after the celebration of the mass for the repose of Armand's soul, at the close of the year since his death,—oh ! that day, what torturing recollections, what a reopening of wounds !—Madame Bernard learnt that General de Voris had returned from Tonkin.

He had written her an exquisite letter, full of tact and fine feeling, on the occasion of Armand's death ; but she had heard nothing from him since, and on returning to Paris he contented himself with leaving a card at Madame Bernard's house.

But the latter soon noticed that several of

her friends mentioned Monsieur de Voris' name very often in her presence, and she quickly guessed with what intention. The general loved her still. She felt it. She was sure of it. Had he not perhaps returned to France in order to approach her again? He knew she was alone in the world. He must have said to himself that now, perhaps, she would accept him for a comforter and a husband, and he had doubtless won over to his cause some of the ladies in the circle who surrounded her.

To marry again! To begin life afresh! The poor woman hardly thought that was possible. However, how could she help being touched by this firm and unchangeable devotion, which nothing had sufficed to tire out, and which, though without any hope, had stood the test of time and absence? Yes, there had been a time when she had a tender feeling for Monsieur de Voris. Alas! What could she offer him now in exchange for his

deep and faithful attachment? Nothing, except a broken heart. But it is with fragments that nests are made.

Thirty-nine years! She was almost an old woman! What was she dreaming about, then?

Perhaps she had looked in the glass. Ah! she had wept too much, and her eyelids were somewhat wrinkled. She was still a good deal like her portrait painted by Dubufe, however,—her portrait when she was twenty. There was in that mirror something better than a phantom of the lovely Bianca Antonini, the young Diana of the Imperial hunt at Compiègne. The marble of her complexion had become a little sallow. A few white threads ran through her masses of black hair. But she had preserved her pure, proud features, her gracefully rounded bosom, her shoulders made for the royal ermine.

“Still beautiful!” she sighed, with a gentle sadness.

Ah! folly! folly!

That very day, the old Duchess of Fried-land, formerly lady-in-waiting to the Empress, an excellent woman, who had shown quite a maternal interest in Madame Bernard lately, came to see her and invited her to take tea at her house to meet a very small company of friends.

“You will find an old acquaintance of yours there, my dear,—General de Voris.”

To accept such an invitation meant, for a woman of Madame Bernard’s character, to give the general encouragement,—almost to engage herself to him. She excused herself, under some pretext or other; but she remained very uneasy in her mind.

Why, then, had she refused? This mar-riage, which in all other respects would be most suitable, presented nothing to her mind but what was sweet and comforting. She had thought a good deal about it, and very seriously too. When she questioned her in-most heart, it pleaded for Monsieur de Voris.

She had already asked herself : "Why not?" She was on the point of replying : "Yes." What was it that checked her on the threshold of that refuge where, after so much suffering, she still might enjoy a little happy rest? What made her hesitate?

Almost nothing. It was the little bunch of violets which she had again found, the Sunday before, on Armand's tomb.

Undoubtedly she had the right to marry, without being unfaithful to her son's memory. Monsieur de Voris, whose nature she knew well, would respect and encourage her devotion to her son's spirit. But never mind! So long as Henriette brought flowers to the cemetery, Madame Bernard would remain a widow. In this rivalry of grief and constancy, she was determined she would not be vanquished.

But on the following Sunday, there was nothing on the tombstone but the violets of the Sunday before, all black and withered.

Henriette had not come to renew her bouquet.

Ah, what a cynical and malicious pleasure Madame Bernard felt in her heart! It was just what she had expected. Armand's mistress had begun to neglect him. She had found a way of consoling herself. Yes, yes. It is only mothers who never forget.

She was careful, nevertheless, not to jump too hastily to a conclusion. Henriette might have been prevented from coming, or she might be absent or ill. It would be better to wait.

But one, two, three Sundays followed, and yet there was nothing, nothing, always nothing.

Then there was triumph for Madame Bernard. Yes! a hundred times yes! her first impulse had been the right one. Her repugnance to those impure flowers was a legitimate feeling. Armand! Armand! Your mother alone loved you truly! She might possibly, towards the close of her life, in her declining

years, lean on the arm of an old friend, a man of honor. But that need not disturb her dear child's rest. His grave would always be in his mother's heart and would always occupy the chief place there. Whilst, as for that girl!— See, her remembrance was at an end already. No doubt, she had found another lover. Ah! the poor dead boy could only depend upon his mother to keep the place of his eternal sleep fragrant. His Henriette would come no more to the cemetery. She had already forgotten the way there.

The Duchess of Friedland soon called again on Madame Bernard des Vignes, and said to her :

“ You must be offended with me, my dear. Have you made up your mind not to come to my house? I wish so much to have you to five-o'clock tea, some Wednesday. General de Voris is so good ; he never fails to come, and he makes us shudder with his stories about the Red River pirates.”

The widow, released from her last scruple, replied with a slight beating of the heart :

“ There is no feeling on my part, I can assure you, dear Duchess. You may rely upon my coming next Wednesday.”





CHAPTER XIV.

FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH.

AH ! What a glorious day ! What a perfect morning !

Under the splendor of a bright blue sky, the landscape of the Parisian quays has a wonderful air of youth and freshness. At the cab-stand, where the sun made the varnished leather of the carriages shine like metal, the clock of the kiosk was striking twelve, and it was the first of June. It was the finest hour of the day and the finest season of the year. The Seine, with its green waves, seemed to flow faster and more merrily than usual that day. The foot-passengers stopped before the second-hand book-stalls, enjoying the pleasant warmth upon their back ; and on the Pont des

Arts, one of the oldest Members of the Institute caught himself humming a couplet of Desangiers, which a pretty girl in high-heeled shoes and leg-of-mutton sleeves had sung to him in a little room at the “Rocher de Cancale” in the reign of Charles X. Undoubtedly we felt young again. There was a pleasure in living in such weather.

In her boudoir, where the fresh air and the gay sunshine came freely through the open window, Madame Bernard des Vignes—yes! she herself—experienced the intoxicating effect of that lovely day.

She was to be married on the next day but one,—the next day but one, she was to lay aside her mourning; and on the sofa, in an open box, there was the bonnet which she was to wear at the ceremony. Presently the milliner presented it to her, poised on her fist, while she said in her most persuasive saleswoman’s tone:

“ See, Madame, it is exactly as you wished.

Something rather subdued. No trimming, except this little branch of lilac."

When she tried the bonnet on before her glass, Madame Bernard thought it was in charming taste and that it became her to perfection,—and she smiled.

Yes! she smiled. For she had once more learned to smile. She was loved. She had become a woman again. She wished to please. One day she had found herself alone with Monsieur de Voris. He had proposed to her; and when she gave him a look that meant consent, she had seen the heroic soldier of the campaigns of Metz and Tonkin fall on his knees, speechless and overcome with happiness, and weep on her hands like a child. To love again! Was she capable of it? At least she was sure of being loved dearly. Oh, how she would enjoy the rest and relaxation of this new world of affection! And then, it was so sweet to make another happy!

No! Armand was not forgotten, and he

never would be. Two days later,—Madame Bernard, kneeling beside her new husband, would think of her son and would pray for her son. And yet, yet! Her old feeling of despair had long since passed away. The deep sorrow which had followed it had been dissolved and had evaporated in a milder melancholy.

No! Armand was not forgotten. Still, the wound had closed and healed. She suffered less,—she who had once been inconsolable; and just now—ah! poor human nature!—she had smiled at her wedding-bonnet, at a pretty bit of millinery.

But a servant came into the boudoir with a letter on a salver.

It was a strange handwriting. Madame Bernard tore open the envelope. Four pages. Whom could this long letter be from? She looked at the signature, “Henriette Perrin,” and this is what she read with a shudder that passed all over her body:

" PARIS, HOSPITAL NECKER, 28th May.

" MADAME:

" I am very ill in the Hospital Necker, and I am so weak that I cannot hold a pen. A patient in the same ward who is recovering is kind enough to write from my dictation; and when I am dead, only when I am dead,—but that will not be long,—she will manage to get this letter to you.

" I cannot go away without having asked your forgiveness for the pain I have caused you. I learned from Armand how angry you were with me, and how displeased with my relations with him. I confess my faults. You admitted me to your house, and were very good to me, and in becoming Armand's lover I seemed to have abused your confidence. I can understand your being offended with me and thinking very badly of me. However, I hope that you will have pity on me and will forgive me when you receive this letter; for then I shall be dead from grief. The doctors say it is disease of the liver. But ever since the death of my beloved Armand I felt that I was dying, and that is the truth.

" Madame, no one tells lies at the point of death. You must believe me. I swear to you that Armand was my first and only lover. I loved him from the first, like a poor, fond fool as I was, as much as it is possible to love anybody. But I did not try to entice him, I assure you; and I am still astonished that he cared for me,—that he did not blush to have such a simple and ignorant girl as I am for his lover. Be

lenient, Madame. Think how very young we both were !

" I well knew that it could not last long, that young men of good family must marry some one of their own rank, and that sooner or later you would persuade your son to leave me. But I was resigned to that beforehand ; and you may be very sure that she whom Armand had once loved would not have become a low woman. Yes, I should have known how to live, all alone in my corner, with the sweet recollection of my happiness, consoling myself with the thought that Armand was happy,—he, at least, with a beautiful wife and children. But that he should die at twenty, within a few days, and that I should not even be able to embrace him for the last time,—that was more than I was able to bear.

" When I learnt that in your doorkeeper's lodge, I received the blow which has killed me. Ever since that awful day I have had as if it were ice round my heart. I began to feel ill directly afterwards, and then, two months after Armand, my dear old aunt was taken in her turn, and I was left all alone. I went on working,—I was obliged to,—but only like a machine, and I went for hours and days without speaking a word to anybody, while my grief was gnawing my heart. My only comfort was to go every Sunday morning to carry flowers to Armand's tomb. And, whilst on that, I beg to thank you, Madame, for leaving my little bouquets beside yours. That is what made me hope that you might be a little less angry with me, and that already you might almost have forgiven me. At last I felt very ill

indeed. I could no longer work, and, having no money, I was obliged to come to the hospital. But if you knew what I suffered the first Sunday that I spent here, thinking to myself that you would only find there my faded bouquet of the previous Sunday, and that you would think I had forgotten my Armand ! That is why I have written to you, that you might know that I died with his name on my lips.

“ Madame, I confessed myself yesterday. The person to whom I am dictating this letter is a religious woman, and she asked me to see a priest. Since my first communion I had never been to church, and I was rather afraid of priests. But the one who came to me spoke very kindly, and told me that my sins would be forgiven. You will be as kind as he was, will you not? You will no longer hate me for having loved your son so much.

“ Adieu, Madame. If I dared to address one more prayer to you, I would ask you, when you go to Montparnasse, to buy a little bunch of the flowers that are in season, at the cemetery-gate, as I used to do,—a penny bunch, no more,—and put them on Armand’s tomb, with your own. The priest told me for certain that we shall meet again in heaven those whom we have loved. But who knows? It seems to me that, all the same, poor Armand, lying there in his coffin, will be glad to receive his little lover’s souvenir. You will be very generous, Madame, if you will kindly do that and gratify the last wish of

“ Your very respectful and most humble servant,

“ HENRIETTE PERRIN.”

Madame Bernard des Vignes burst into tears when she finished reading this letter. How dull it had become, all of a sudden,—that June sun ! How gloomy that spring morning was ! And there, on the sofa, in the open box, was the pretty bonnet with its spray of lilac ! It made her sick to look at it then,—the fair lady who was to be married on the morrow ! She felt ashamed of it !

Assuredly, she had forgiven and she would forgive again ! Assuredly, she would fulfil the wish of the dead ! But gazing at the signature of Henriette Perrin,—the only two words the poor girl had been able to trace with her dying hand,—Armand's mother murmured in a low voice, in a voice of defeat, and with a paroxysm of bitterness and jealousy :

“ She loved him better than I did.”

THE END.

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